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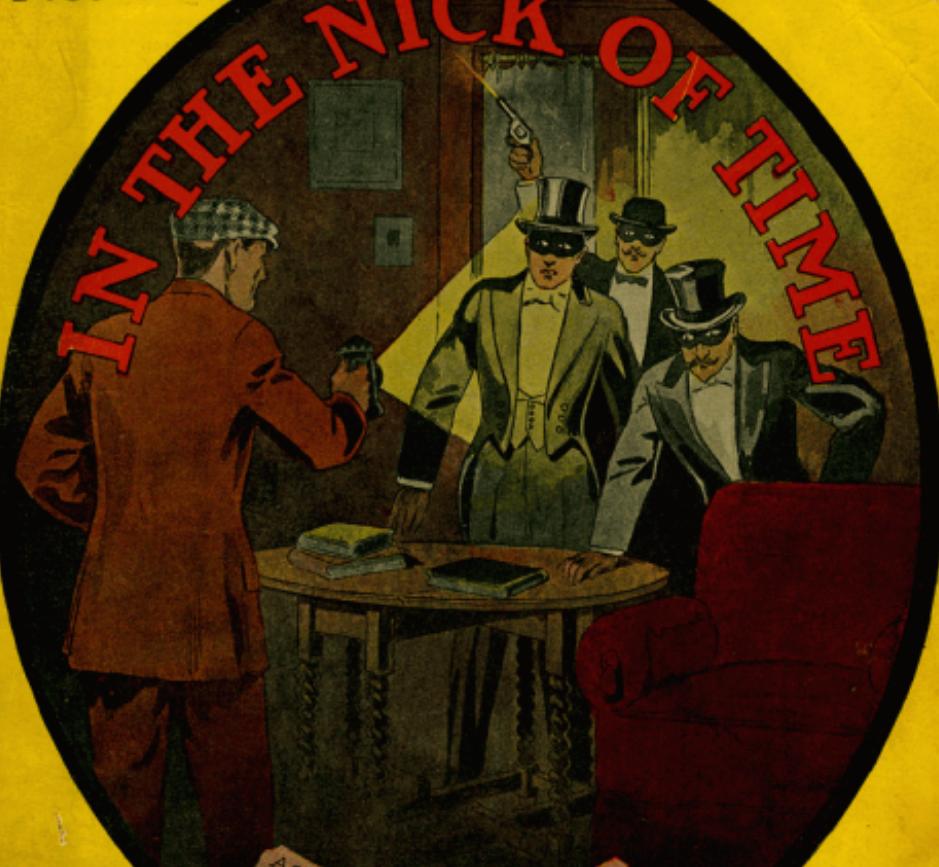


OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

No. 165

Price 5 cents

IN THE NICK OF TIME



AS THE DETECTIVE FLASHED HIS
LIGHT UPON THE INTRUDERS, A
REVOLVER SHOT RANG OUT.

by
**"OLD
SLEUTH"**

The
ARTHUR WESTBROOK
Company
CLEVELAND
U. S. A.

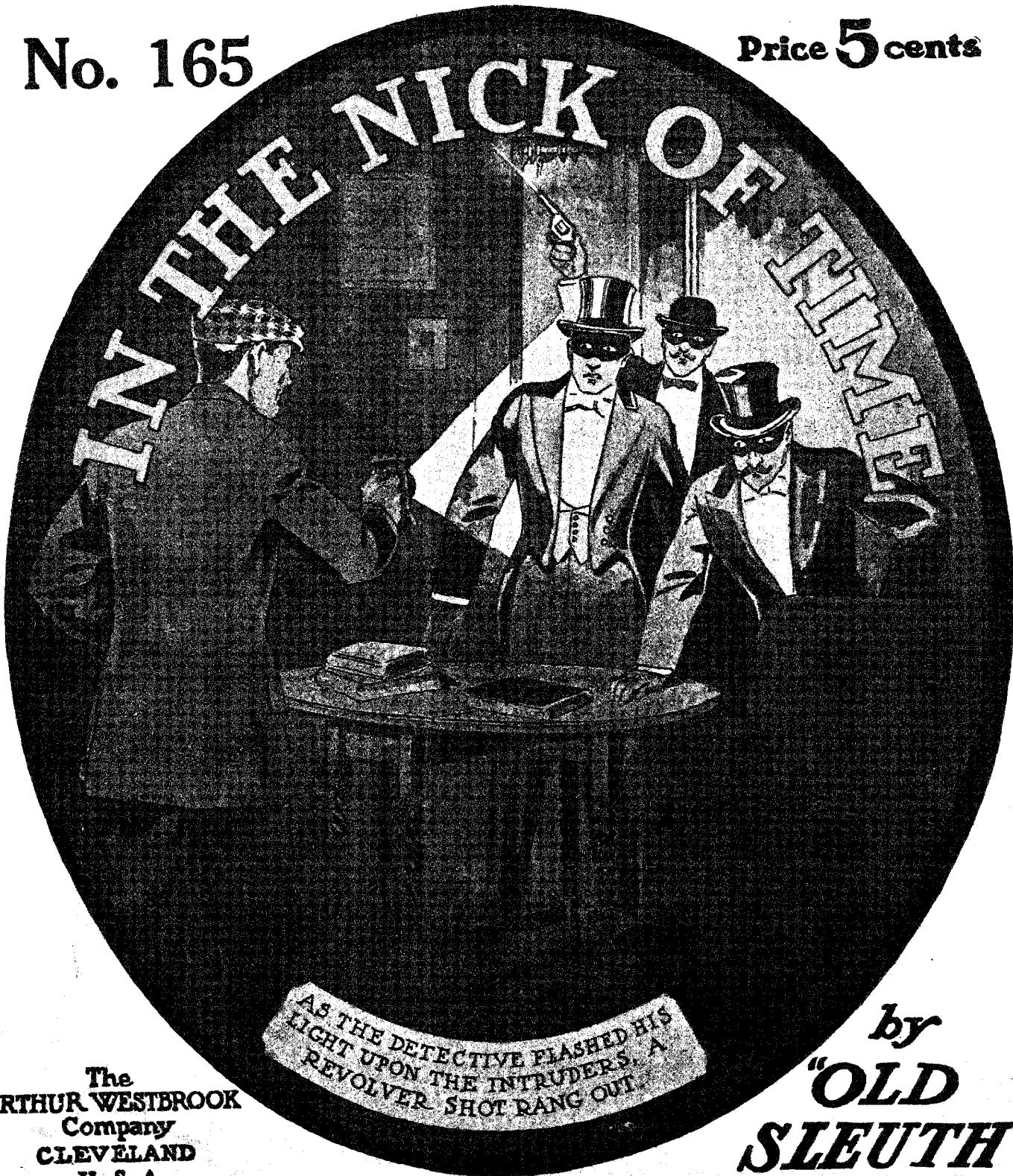


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A Series of

THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED

No. 165

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Vol. IV

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IN THE NICK OF TIME,

or

A Fair Maiden's Peril

BY "OLD SLEUTH"

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

BERT WELDON—A famous and successful detective who faces the most complicated mystery of his career.

SUE BAXTER—A queer character, supposed to be a thief and confidence woman.

ARTHUR CREEVELING—A disinherited young man and a fugitive from justice.

EVA WELLS—A beautiful young woman who believes herself to be the daughter of a notorious burglar.

SIDNEY MURRAY—Accused of having robbed his employer and also a fugitive from justice.

MR. CREEVEY—Who has been seeking a long lost child, and who has inherited a great fortune that Creeveling claimed was rightfully his.

BILLY BOND—A detective.

TOMMY DATE—A consort of crooks.

HORACE ELMER—A lawyer.

JIM SPARKS—A desperate criminal.

HENRY GWIN—A young millionaire in bad company.

CHAPTER I.

TO BEAUTY'S RESCUE.

Bert Weldon, detective, well muffled to keep out the cold, was passing along Broadway when he felt a touch on his arm.

The detective turned, beholding a sweet face, lighted by a pair of handsome blue eyes. It was a young girl who had accosted him.

"May I speak to you, sir?"

"What can I do for you?" demanded the officer.

"You are a detective?"

"I am. What do you wish?"

"I wish to tell you my story. I am in great trouble. Can you come to my home?"

After a moment's consideration the detective replied:

"I will go with you."

The couple started to walk away, the girl having lowered her veil, when the young woman clutched the detective's arm, a low cry falling from her lips.

"What is it, my child?"

"Ah, he is there and he recognized me!"

The detective glanced around, but saw no one, and said so.

"But I saw him," insisted the girl. "He passed on the opposite side of the street."

"Do you fear this man?"

"He will kill me."

"This man who is dodging you is your enemy?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

Bert Weldon had seen the girl's face. He had read there refinement and honesty and virtue.

"Sis, I have not heard your story. I will listen to it at a more convenient time. We will now find out what this man means. I will leave you at that corner yonder."

"Oh, do not leave me," begged the young woman.

"Have no fears. I will accompany you to your home, but you go ahead and I will fall to the rear, pretending to bid you good night."

At the corner indicated the couple bid each other good night so that any one across the street might have heard and understood, then the detective turned, walking rapidly away. The girl had proceeded several blocks in the direction of her home when suddenly a man darted from the shadow of an alleyway, seizing hold of the girl. At the same instant a carriage drew up at the curb right beside them. A man sprang from the carriage going to the assistance of the assailant.

Suddenly a third party appeared on the scene. Two thuds were heard, the girl's assailants dropping to the sidewalk.

"Come along, sis, it's all right," announced Bert Weldon in a confident tone. He led the girl from the scene, while the coachman leaped from his box going to the assistance of the knocked-out men. He helped them in, then drove rapidly away, pulling up at their request further on. The driver gave the men some good advice, telling them at the same time, that in his opinion, the man who had assailed them was a "fly cop."

The two men stood a moment after the carriage had driven on, then they entered a door, ascended a flight of stairs, proceeding to a well lighted room on the upper floor. The apartment looked to be club rooms. Instead the place was a gambling house.

The two men sought out a quiet place where they seated themselves.

"Well, Henry, Jim is a nice go," exclaimed one.

The speaker was a good looking young fellow, belonging, however, to the class known as "fast young men." The elder man was coarse-faced, loudly dressed, of the type usually seen on race tracks.

"I thought I had things dead to rights," declared the younger man.

"So did I."

"I don't know what's come over me, but I'm dead gone on that girl. I'll have her, no matter what the odds are against me. But what do you think about what happened tonight?"

"It's certain the coachman was right. She was onto our scheme."

"I'll bet a hundred that Sid Murray is lurking around New York," declared the younger man suddenly.

"Well, if you can get him in a box and get him sent up you would have a clear field," suggested the elder man.

"Right you are. I'll do it. You see I am on the lay for him."

The two men were still discussing their recent adventure when a dudish looking young man entered the room where they were. The conversation ceased instantly. The newcomer threw himself upon a sofa as if he were in need of rest.

"Don't mind me," he said addressing the two men.

The elder man passed a wink to his companion, then the two began discussing commonplace affairs. Soon after that the pair arose and left the room.

"I'm onto that fellow," announced the elder man when they had gotten out of the room. "That chap is the one who gave us our knockout."

Bert Weldon after seeing the girl home had, after working a change, proceeded to the gambling place. He had recognized one of the men as a well known criminal, and felt sure he would find the fellow at the gambling house where he was known to hang out.

"Aha, our friend Sparks recognized me," muttered the detective as he marked the glance the elder man shot at him. "You know Sparks?" asked Weldon of a man who was sitting near him. "You saw him here just now?"

"Yes."

"Who is the younger man with him?"

"Harry Gwin. His father was a wealthy wholesale merchant in Philadelphia. He left that cub over two millions. He is a bad egg. Sparks has him in tow and is living on him."

Bert having obtained all the information along this line, needed for the time being, left the gambling place, proceeding to the home of the young woman whom he had rescued. In the meantime Sparks and his protégé had gone to their hotel.

"Harry," said the elder man, after the two had reached their hotel, "take my advice and drop this affair."

"Why?"

"There's a bad man on your track. That fellow who gave us the tap on the nut is Bert Weldon, the detective."

"I'll not give up the chase till I get the girl," declared Harry belligerently, "and I'll get square with Sid Murray too."

"If this fellow Weldon, is the girl's friend, you've undertaken a big contract," warned the elder man. "I'll stick by you, of course, but as I have said, you've undertaken a big contract."

While this conversation was taking place, Bert Weldon was listening to a strange tale from the lips of the fair young girl whom he had rescued. A tale that excited his interest as had no other story in all his varied career as a detective, but all unbeknown to the two villains whom he had so recently given a sound beating.

CHAPTER II.

STOLEN WHEN A CHILD.

"You have not told me your name," said the detective.

"I am known as Eva Wells," answered the young girl.

"What is your real name?"

"First let me tell you my story."

"Proceed."

"Do you remember that some three years ago a notorious burglar was found mysteriously murdered?"

"I do. His supposed name was—"

"I am the supposed daughter of that man. I have reason to believe that he was not really my father, however. When I was about two years old a man came to a widow, consigning to her care a child. I was the child. Money was left with her for my support and education. The lady whom I learned to call mother, did not see the man again until five years had passed. He came again, giving her more money. The lady sent me to school, and everyone believed me to be her daughter."

"Her name is Wells?" questioned the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"Is she the lady who admitted me here?"

"Yes, sir. Years passed, more money was sent, a great deal of it so that my guardian was able to lay up a large sum of money for me. Mrs. Wells in the meantime had explained to me all that she knew of my history."

"Did she tell you your supposed father was a burglar?"

"She did not learn of the fact herself until a few years ago when he was pointed out to her a notorious burglar. She followed the man, taxing him with the charge, which he admitted. She demanded to know if I was his child. The man betrayed considerable excitement and after an interval said, 'She is not my child. Some day I will tell you all.'"

"Did he never make any admissions regarding you?" asked the detective.

"I believe that he did admit that I had been stolen from my parents. Shortly before his death, mother received a letter from him saying that in case anything befell him, documentary proof would be forthcoming establishing my real identity. He added that possibly I was an heiress."

"Were the proofs forthcoming?"

"No, sir."

After a moment's thought, the detective said:

"I think this mystery can be solved. I already have formed a theory. I want you to tell me about the man who appears to be your bitter enemy?"

"Something like a year ago," said the girl, "I met a young gentleman at the home of a schoolmate. He paid me a great deal of attention, finally declaring his

love for me. My mother upon investigation, found him to be a young man of irreproachable character. But alas, I had my own secret. There was a possibility that I was the daughter of a criminal. I had not the courage to tell him the truth, but hoped in good time to establish my real identity. I refused to consent to marriage, but did not wholly discourage him. One evening on the street I was approached by a perfect stranger who sought to force an acquaintance upon me. He followed me to my home once, where my real friend gave the loafer a good thrashing. There followed bitter enmity between them. Now comes the terrible part of my narrative. A robbery occurred in the establishment where my friend was employed. He was arrested accused of having committed the crime, and put in jail. He managed to escape while on his way to court, and has since been a fugitive."

"You believe him to be innocent?"

"I know he is innocent."

"You have seen him since then?"

"Yes. He came to me in disguise."

"The man who is persecuting you is named Henry Gwin?"

The girl gave a start.

"How did you discover that?" she demanded.

"I know all about him. He was one of the men who assaulted you tonight. Now what do you wish me to do in this matter, Miss?"

"I have some money. I want you to investigate the robbery and establish the innocence of my friend."

"I will undertake the case," decided the detective after a few moments' reflection. "And now, what is the young man's name?"

"Sidney Murray."

"Ah. I have a word of encouragement for you, Miss. I had already concluded that young Murray was innocent. I already have investigated that case a little."

Her face flushed with pleasure. The girl left the room, returning a moment later with a photograph of Murray. After studying it, Bert Weldon glanced up with a smile.

"He does not look like a thief, does he, Miss?"

"He is not a thief."

"All right, I will investigate, and in a few days I may have something of importance to report to you. Be of good cheer, and do not venture from the house any more than you find absolutely necessary."

"Yes, sir, I shall do as you suggest."

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE MEETING.

A singular theory had entered Bert Weldon's mind. After leaving the young woman he wandered down Broadway, under the disguise of a hayseed. He had not gone far when a veiled woman approached him saying in a piteous tone:

"In Heaven's name take me to a restaurant and give me a meal."

The detective was about to order the woman away, having instantly recognized her as a thief, but an impulse which he was never afterwards able to explain, led him to let the game work a little.

"Come along," said Bert, "I'll give you a feed."

The woman grasped his arm, leading the way to an all-night restaurant. The woman ordered a hearty meal, and while waiting for it to be brought, she said:

"There is something on my mind that bothers me a great deal."

"Better give it to the waiter," suggested the detective.

"You are a pretty good man."

"Thank you. Have you started in?"

The woman had removed her veil, disclosing a face that once had been beautiful, that was still comely. She smiled when the detective put the question.

"When I want to rob a man I do not select a famous detective as a victim."

The detective glared and again the woman smiled sweetly.

"I asked you to give me a meal. You granted my request. It's lucky for you that you did."

"What are you getting at?"

"You are Bert Weldon. When I struck you for a meal I expected to get it. I knew you were a kind-hearted man and I meant to give you a chance as you have me."

"Look here, sis, you have the advantage of me, who are you?"

The woman laughed again.

"They call me Sue Baxter," she said.

Weldon had heard of Sue Baxter and there came to his mind a sudden recollection. He had heard that name mentioned in connection with the burglar who had been mysteriously murdered. The whole succession of incidents were indeed very strange.

"You have heard of me?" said the woman.

"Yes."

"And you think I am a bad woman?"

The detective did not answer.

"I am an unfortunate woman, that's all. Some day I will tell you my story."

"Tell me now."

"No."

"You met me by design?"

"No, but I should have been looking for you tomorrow. Tonight, yes, within an hour previous to my meeting you, I got onto a job that has been put up against you—a scheme to drop you out."

"Why am I to be 'dropped out'?"

"I haven't got onto that part yet. I shall have tomorrow. In the meantime, be on your guard."

"How much money are you looking for, Sue?"

"I'll leave that to you. Can't you give me a little information?"

"Of what nature?"

"You are engaged on a case. If you let me into your scheme, I may be able to aid you. I well know how to shadow the whole gang."

"I am not opening up my business on so short acquaintance, although I will admit it has been a very agreeable one so far."

At that moment two men entered the place, seating themselves at a table, just as Sue leaned toward the detective. As she did so he discovered a locket dangling from a string at her neck.

"Mark those two men who entered," said the detective. As she turned he deftly lifted the locket, breaking it from the string.

The newcomers were two well-known crooks. The rascals saw Sue and the detective, at once exchanging glances.

"Hold on, that won't do," exclaimed the woman suddenly discovering the loss of her locket. "Return that at once."

"I was merely practicing," laughed Bert, at the same time snapping open the locket, gazing at the face in it. Then he took a closer glance.

"Let me keep this, Sue."

"No, no, no," protested the woman, a fierce gleam shooting into her eyes.

"What do you know about the death of the original of this picture?" demanded the detective suddenly.

The woman's face became livid.

"Wha—what do you mean?"

"This is a photograph of—"

"'Tis false!"

"You do not know all that I know, Sue. Sis, this is a very remarkable coincidence, this discovery of the picture and my meeting with you. I am seeking information concerning that man, not as—but under his other character."

"He is dead," said the woman. "I will not deny that you are correct."

"Sue, what do you know about the original of this picture?"

"I know all about him," came the low-spoken answer.

"Tell me what you know about him."

"Why do you wish to know?"

"I cannot tell you now."

"Then neither can I tell you anything about him," replied the woman rising and announcing her intention of departing.

"You are determined to go?"

"I am."

"Where may I meet you tomorrow?"

"Here at midnight."

The woman left the place. Our hero sauntered up to the pay counter, settling his checks. He then

stepped over to the table where the two men were seated.

"If you fellows leave this place within ten minutes after I go out, I'll break both your necks and lock you up," warned the detective.

"Tommy, we'll let him pass," nodded one of the two as the detective passed from the restaurant.

Upon the day following, our hero sought out his detective friend Billy Bond and to him said:

"I had a queer adventure after I left you yesterday. I met a woman and discovered that I had dropped upon a great lay. Her name is Sue Baxter. Did you ever meet her?"

"No, but I'd like to."

"Was she mixed up in the——murder?"

"Her name was mentioned in the affair, but we never got onto her. She was a mystery we could not solve. I'd like to meet that gal."

"You can. I will arrange it."

"Good enough. When?"

"I will let you know."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DESERTED HOUSE.

On the following evening Bert Weldon was on hand to keep his appointment with Sue Baxter. He did not immediately enter the restaurant, but shadowed the place from the opposite side of the street. After a time a veiled woman appeared. Several times she passed up and down in front of the place peering in as if in search of some one.

The detective discovered at once that the woman was not the one he was to meet, deciding at the same time that the stranger was there to pipe him off.

Suddenly the woman turned and walked rapidly away. The detective was upon her trail almost instantly. She reached one of the best streets in the city where he saw her enter an elegant house. Bert was not more than twenty feet away when the door closed behind the veiled woman.

All the surrounding houses as well were very respectable and even high class. Weldon moved away lost in deep thought. The detective took up a position opposite the house where he stood looking up at the windows. At length he saw a woman's form appear at the window. He recognized it as belonging to a beautiful young girl.

All at once the door of the mansion opened and a woman came forth. For an instant the officer stood actually paralyzed with astonishment.

It was Sue Baxter.

"Great thunder what does this mean?" muttered the detective.

A handsome equipage met her and she was driven rapidly away. A few hours later she returned. He was particularly interested in the coachman whom he inter-

viewed later, learning that the fellow's name was Tommy Date. He was unable, however, to get any satisfactory information out of the lad, so he set to watching the house again. Eleven o'clock arrived and the detective determined upon another course. The second house beyond was in darkness. He made an investigation, coming to the conclusion that the house was unoccupied.

Bert let himself in at the basement door, then ascended to the next floor. He gained the parlor, and glancing about was surprised at that which met his gaze. There was a profusion of elegant furniture. Bric-à-brac lay broken and scattered in every direction. A fine portrait had been slashed with a knife.

"What have I tumbled to here?" muttered the perplexed officer. After a closer investigation he reached the conclusion that a desperate combat had taken place in that room. Flashing his light about the rich carpet he discovered dark stains. There could be no doubt about it, they were blood stains.

After completing his examination the detective ascended to the top floor, passed through the scuttle and gained the roof and made his way to the roof of the other mansion from which he had seen Sue Baxter emerge and re-enter again. He lifted the scuttle and boldly entered.

Suddenly he felt himself grasped with a strong grip. He downed his assailant, and to his amazement found himself in the grip of a negro woman. She proved to be a servant in the house. Bert quickly bound and gagged her, then descended to a room above the parlor of the mansion.

As he peeped into the room he beheld a strange sight. He saw Sue Baxter reclining on a sofa, attired in a magnificent robe. Priceless jewels glittered in her ears and on her fingers. Near her sat the beautiful girl whom the detective had seen at the window.

"Lucy, I fear the time has arrived when we must leave," Sue Baxter was saying.

"Oh, Auntie," came the answer. "I shall be so delighted if you will so decide."

"Yes, my dear, I am discouraged. I will give up the chase. I have lived here at great peril, at any moment there may come an exposure."

"But you are deliberately cultivating the Associations. You are rich, we can go away, we can flee to Europe and there no one ever will recognize us."

"I should have liked to warn that detective, Bert Weldon," mused Sue. "But, alas, the risk was too great. And my other protégé, I fear I shall have to leave him to his fate. I can do no more. I have made up my mind to flee from here. Ah, had my fortune come a few years earlier I could have rescued my husband."

"The mystery of his death never will be solved?" questioned the girl.

"Never."

This conversation was all distinctly heard by the detective and he was deeply mystified.

"You retire to your room, now, Lucy, and tomorrow we will decide upon our course. What a strange fate mine has been," muttered Sue after the younger woman had left the room. "I am the widow of a criminal. Mine is a blighted life, and yet I am rich and my wealth came to me in an honorable manner and no one can question my right to it. But I fear the mystery of my double life has been opened. By my own imprudence I invited the discovery, and now all that remains to me is flight."

Silence fell over the room. Bert Weldon decided upon a bold course. He worked a transformation right at the door of the room without having made the slightest sound, then he stepped in.

Sue Baxter gazed at him inquiringly. The woman did not scream, but sat looking at him. Very calmly she reached down in the folds of her gown from which she drew a revolver, coolly pointing it at him.

Bert did not flinch. He stood with a smile upon his face looking at her.

"Well, sir, who are you and what do you want?" demanded the woman.

"A few words with you. You need have no fear. Put away your weapon, I intend no harm."

She did as requested, laughing carelessly.

"You have done it well, sir. I did not care to see you. Now, what do you want?"

Bert saw instantly that his disguise had been penetrated.

"You were to meet me?"

"I sent a messenger and you trailed that messenger. How did you gain admission to this house?"

"A strange question from you, Mrs. Fairfax."

"So you are on to that name, eh?"

"I am. I have come for information. Will you give it to me?"

"No, Bert Weldon. I think well of you. As I said, I accidentally got on to a plan to drop you, but now I am satisfied there is nothing in it."

"Then turn-about is fair play, I will serve you. You are interested in Tommy Date?"

"I feel sorry for him."

"You do not know who he really is?"

"I do not."

"Will you tell me how you happened to be interested in him?"

"I know very little about him."

"You saved his life?"

"Yes."

"Under what circumstances?"

"I am perfectly willing to tell you if you will first tell me his real identity."

The detective considered a moment, then said:

"He is a gentleman."

"I thought so," came the confident answer.

CHAPTER V.

SOME STARTLING REVELATIONS.

"You have hinted that you know who I am," said the woman changing the subject. "Who am I?"

"You are the widow of—" The detective mentioned the name of the burglar who had been so mysteriously murdered. The woman's face went ghastly. "Let us be friends. You will find it to your advantage. I can tell you something about your husband's death."

"You—you—can—tell—me—"

"As matters stand you are liable to arrest for complicity in the crime. Sharp men are at this moment searching for Sue Baxter. I am not yet satisfied that you really were my friend—"

"I have told you the truth about that matter. Do you believe I am a murderer?"

"I know that a woman had a hand in the murder of —"

Sue Baxter leaped from her seat, grasped the detective by the shoulders and in excited tones demanded:

"Is what you say the truth?"

"It is."

"This is terrible. I am an innocent woman. It is strange you do not suspect my identity," she added in a lower tone. "You should remember me when I was a girl."

"I do not place you. Tell me your story and if you are innocent I will aid you to the best of my ability. I know where the murder was committed."

"That is well known. The murder occurred near where the body was found."

"You know better."

It was the woman's turn to stare in amazement.

"Where did it occur?" demanded the woman sharply.

"Not far from here. Not in this house. The scene of the murder is as it was on the night the deed was done. I can show you the blood stains, I can show you a sight that will make your hair stand on end. Why have you been dodging the detectives?"

"To avoid disagreeable explanations."

"I believe in you and that is why I desire that you shall confide in me."

Sue reflected for some moments, then she said:

"There is not another man in the world to whom I would reveal the facts I am about to disclose to you. My real name is Mary Carpenter."

The detective leaped to his feet.

"You are Mary Carpenter?" he repeated.

"I am, the daughter of the late James Carpenter."

"This is indeed a wonderful revelation."

"I am supposed to be in the cemetery at—"

Bert Weldon was a native of the same town where Sue claimed to have been born and reared. The two had been sweethearts. When he left his native town it was with the promise that he would return to wed her. Then a few years later came the intelligence that the girl had died. A year following the death of his daughter, James Carpenter had sold out his business and gone west.

Bert Weldon sat staring at the woman before him. At length he broke the silence.

"Your father died believing you dead?"

"He did not. He knew that I was living within six months after my disappearance. He accumulated a great fortune, most of which he left to me on his death."

"You are known as Sue Baxter?"

"I am not the real Sue Baxter."

"But you are associated with thieves."

The woman smiled in a strange way.

"That is true. But I am as pure and free from crime as any woman in New York today."

"You have a purpose—what is your purpose?"

"I am seeking to solve the mystery of my husband's death."

"Do you remember the year I left my native town?"
She named the year.

"You can convince me beyond all doubt that you are really Mary Carpenter by relating the incidents preceding your departure from home."

"On the night you left, you told Mary Carpenter that you loved her. You were going abroad to make your fortune, but that you would return some day to claim Mary's love. She promised to wait. But she was a young impressionable girl."

"I held your memory sacred—I mourned for you," said Bert in a low tone. A tear trickled down the cheek of Sue Baxter.

"I was not a woman when I pledged my heart to you, I was but a child. You are now convinced that I am Mary Carpenter?"

"I am, Mary, I am getting wonderfully interested in you, and after you have told me your story, I have a very startling revelation to make."

"After that last meeting of ours years ago," continued Sue, "I carried a heart filled with hope. But I was a romantic girl and impressions did not take as firm a hold of me as they might have. I ceased to care for you. I was just seventeen when I was invited to join a party for a few weeks in the Adirondacks. One morning a young lady friend and myself went off fishing in the mountains. We became separated. Suddenly I found myself confronted by a bear. I could do nothing. I was paralyzed. The bear started slowly toward me. Then there came a shot and the ugly beast rolled over dead. Suddenly a man issued from the bushes. He was a singularly handsome man, dressed in a hunting suit. He came down to where I was standing, his magnificent eyes fixed upon me.

"Well, you had a scare, didn't you?" he laughed.

"His voice thrilled me. You can guess who this man was. He afterwards became my husband. He introduced himself to me as Howard Menzies. I invited him to go with me to my friends. He refused, asking me as a favor not to mention anything about the bear nor that I had met him. It was a most singular request, but I obeyed. Days passed ere I saw Howard again. One evening I was out walking when he appeared before me. I was charmed with him. I met him several times after that and finally demanded that he should tell me why he refused so persistently to meet my friends.

"He told me that he was the son of a wealthy baronet, that he and his father had quarreled and that he had fled away to America. He also told me that he had a bitter enemy and that he was hiding from this bitter foe, leading me to believe that it would be a dangerous thing for him to meet strangers."

"You still believe that he told you the truth?"

"I do and I always have. That man had a secret. Although he was a burglar he was a generous man and so far as I could learn he was also a truthful man. He professed to love me. I confessed my love for him. And we parted. We did not meet again until I had arrived home. Again he appeared before me suddenly one night. He told me that great changes had occurred in his family, that millions of money were involved and that there was greater need of secrecy than ever. We met frequently after that and finally he demanded that I become his wife. He proposed a secret marriage and I consented. He said I must become lost to the world when I became his bride."

"You are certain you were really married?" interrupted the detective.

"Yes."

"Have you reason to suppose that he was a bigamist?"

"Yes, I have reason to believe that. He had the photograph of a child of whom he appeared to be very fond. He said it was the child of a very dear friend. But to return to the story. He arranged about my losing my identity as it were."

"How about the body that was buried in your name?"

"He got it from a morgue. Time passed and I discovered that my husband was a burglar. It was a terrible discovery. It nearly broke my heart."

CHAPTER VI.

SUE CONTINUES HER STORY.

"My husband went with me to our cottage home, remaining with me for a year. It was the happiest year of my life. But, alas, my bright dream came to an end. One day I returned to the house, finding my husband engaged in a desperate conflict with a man, whom he eventually succeeded in throwing from the house. He explained that his enemy had found him out. My husband went away. I did not see him for three years. I heard from him, then lost all track of him. Finally I learned that he was in prison. His time was nearly up then."

"Did you ever learn the circumstances under which your husband was tried and sentenced?"

"I never did. I heard, however, that he was sentenced under the confession of a pal. After his release from prison he spent six months with me, then went away. Finally I received a letter from him that filled my heart with joy. He said that the mission of his life had been accomplished, that he had told me the truth when he first met me. He said that he would make a revelation to me and that never again would the blush of shame mantle my cheeks because of being his wife. He was to give up his criminal life."

Sue paused.

"Proceed," urged the detective.

"Alas, I have little more to tell. I received a second letter stating that he would soon be with me. The next news I heard was that my husband was dead, that he had been found dead—murdered."

The woman paused in tears.

"You have been in New York ever since?"

"Yes, I met the woman Sue Baxter and strangely enough we resembled each other. She committed suicide. She had once been an honorable girl and the day arrived when her remorse became so great that she killed herself."

"Have you succeeded in getting any points tending to solve the mystery?"

"Not one."

"I think I can aid you," announced the detective after a moment's thought.

"You can aid me?"

"Yes, I can and I will."

"Mary—I shall call you by that name—you alluded to a child in whom your husband was interested. You have never learned any facts about that child, have you?"

"No. I have a photograph of it."

"Let me see it."

Sue brought the photograph. The moment Bert Weldon fixed his gaze upon the picture he uttered an exclamation.

"You appear to recognize the girl?"

"I do. Do you want to see her?"

"I must see her if you can help me to find her."

"In good time you shall."

The detective pointed toward the room where Lucy had gone.

"She doesn't come into our tragedy, does she?"

"No. She is the niece of the real Sue Baxter. The latter left the girl in my charge with money for her bringing up."

"The original of this picture is the reputed daughter of your late husband," said the detective.

"It is as I feared," almost screamed the woman.

"But, the girl does not believe she is your husband's daughter."

"Who does she claim to be?"

"She is seeking to discover that, and I have another very thrilling statement to make. The young man Tommy Date—"

"I care nothing about him—"

"You will care more when you hear what I have to say. He is connected with the life of this girl. I have learned much through accident. I believe I am on the track of your husband's murderer. I believe that, together we shall solve this deep mystery."

A long talk followed. Day had dawned when our hero finally left the house and went to his lodgings. It was the following evening when he again issued forth. He was walking along Broadway really searching for Tommy Date when he suddenly observed a fellow detective shadowing a man. That man was no other than Tommy Date himself, so Bert with a chuckle set in to shadow the two.

Tommy entered a well-known saloon. Bert worked a transform and followed. He saw that the detective was working on a suspicion. Bert managed to get over to where Tommy was sitting, passing a thief's recognition, which Tommy answered. The latter appeared to be well up in the silent language of the crooks.

"You are being shadowed," signalled Weldon.

Tommy was alarmed. He made his way from the saloon at the first opportunity, followed by the other sleuth. At the first opportunity Bert passed his man, leaving a card in the latter's hands on which was written, "A cop is on your track. Go somewhere so you can give him the drop."

Tommy slid along. His shadow by this time had been joined by a brother detective. The pursued man went over to the eastern part of the city, passing in to the East Side Park. He had been there but a few minutes when the two detectives appeared.

Bert knew that the shindy was about to commence. He crept closer as the two men drew up near where Date was sitting on a bench.

"You fellows get out of here," commanded Tommy, "You can't rob me. I'm up to your game."

At that the officer drew his club leaping forward. Tommy knocked him down. The second officer now took a hand in the fray. Bert Weldon also took a hand and a moment more the two men were clean knocked out.

"Run for it," commanded Bert.

"Where will I meet you," demanded Tommy,

Weldon named a place, then set off on a run in an opposite direction. In due time our hero arrived at the appointed place, he also having gotten away before the officers came to their senses. Tommy Date was awaiting him.

"Now, my friend, who are you?" demanded the young man.

"You don't place me?"

"No, I don't."

"You should look upon me as a friend now." The last words were spoken in the detective's natural voice. Tommy stared.

"I know you now. You helped me so you could do the closing in," added the young man bitterly.

"You are mistaken. I want to be your friend, but on conditions."

"Name your conditions."

"My conditions are that you make a clean breast of everything to me."

"On what charge are those men hounding me?"

"They say you are a notorious thief. I think they are onto your real identity. They think you are Sid Murray."

The change that came over Tommy's face at that moment was startling.

"Are you really Sid Murray?"

"Yes, I am, but I am as innocent as you are. I did not put up that job to rob my employer."

"How did you become implicated?"

"I have an enemy. His name is Gwin."

"You appear to be on good terms with criminals?"

"Yes, but I have a purpose. I am trying to establish my innocence. In assuming the rôle of Tommy Date I also assumed his record. I am not a thief. I went in with the thieves when I became a fugitive for two reasons—safety and cover, and again I thought I might run down the real robbers of my employers."

"Do you know Sue Baxter?"

"She has been a friend of mine."

"Did you ever tell her about Eva Wells?"

"What do you know about Eva Wells, and why do you associate her name with mine?" came the question.

CHAPTER VII.

TOMMY FINDS A FRIEND.

After a long interview with Tommy Date the detective escorted the young man to his own home.

"You will be safe there. No one will look for Tommy Date in Bert Weldon's home," laughed the detective.

Bert then returned to the home of Sue Baxter, entering the house in the same way that he had done on the previous occasion. Sue was awaiting him.

"I have thought over the story you told me," he began, "and the more I think, the more am I convinced that there is a great mystery that you and I must solve. There is no longer need that you should masquerade as Sue Baxter. You may run into serious trouble. You spoke once before of having caught your husband at the game of burglary and of learning the story from the woman at whose house he lived. Would you recognize her were you to see her?"

"Yes"

"Did you ever see her husband?"

"Once. I do not remember where the place was, though."

"Did it ever strike you that the place was somewhere in this vicinity?"

"No."

"Can you assume a male disguise?"

"Yes."

"Prepare yourself in male attire and I will make a disclosure. I think I can take you to the house where the murder occurred."

Sue's face blanched. After she had prepared herself for the adventure, Bert Weldon led the way up through the scuttle and down into the house where he had made his previous startling discoveries.

"You need have no fears," he said. "This place is unoccupied."

But his companion was trembling with agitation. The detective led the way down the stairs, when suddenly both came to a halt. The glimmer of a light below had caught their attention.

"I must investigate. You go upstairs and wait," commanded the detective.

Bert made his way below, and when he had reached the parlor he peered in sharply. There was no one there. He kept himself out of sight. From that he stepped out into the center of the front parlor, then moved to the back parlor.

Still there was no sign of the presence of any one else, save that the lamp was burning brightly on the parlor table.

A moment the detective considered then said:

"We will see about this."

At that he stepped forward and blew out the light. There followed no demonstration. He was compelled to conclude that his presence had been discovered. Fully twenty minutes passed, and still there was no sign of any one else being in the room. Bert slid the mask of his lantern, flashing the light around, but saw nothing alarming. Finally he relit the lamp on the table. Then the detective reascended the stairs where he found his companion anxiously awaiting him.

"What have you discovered?" she whispered.

"Nothing."

"Is it possible our presence has been discovered?"

"It is possible."

"Then we had better return at once."

"No, we will remain and take our chances."

The couple descended the stairs, entering the parlor. The detective led the woman to a portrait hanging on the wall and flashing his light upon it demanded:

"Did you ever see that picture before?"

The woman gazed with distended eyes, trembling in every limb.

"You do not answer me?"

"It is true," she said in a low, hoarse tone. "I have seen that picture before."

It was the picture of a woman. He moved to a second picture, throwing his light upon that, asking her if she recognized it. The woman nodded her head.

"This is the house where you visited?"

"Yes, it must be."

Bert Weldon led the way into the rear room where he flashed his light down to the blood stains. The woman almost fainted.

"What does this mean?" she demanded.

"A murder was committed here. This house has been closed for more than three years—it was closed about the time your husband was killed."

"It is strange that I should have purchased a house in this same row and should have failed to recognize this place."

The detective detailed all the facts in his possession and then demanded:

"You met your husband here?"

"Yes, in the room where I was sleeping."

"When you taxed him with being a burglar he denied it?"

"He said he had entered this house to find a certain paper. He disclaimed being a burglar, but afterwards admitted that he was a burglar."

"If it was your husband who came to this house, and if he was murdered here, he entered the house on invitation," announced the detective with emphasis.

"How do you know?"

"I have proofs. Look!"

Bert Weldon produced a note he had picked up on his previous visit to the house. Sue went to the light where she read the note. As the woman read her agitation increased.

"You recognize the name?"

"I do not."

"But you can well discover that the note was addressed to your husband?"

"I must so conclude."

"I believe it possible that your husband told the truth when he said he was not a burglar."

"I would be glad to accept your theory, but I cannot, no, I cannot. I am convinced that he was indeed a burglar. Remember how notorious he was. There can be no doubt as to his real guilt."

"We will wait and investigate. You have seen those portraits—you recognize them so that you can identify the originals?"

"I can."

"One word more. What was the name of the woman?"

"I knew her as Madame Leitz. Her husband was known as Alphonse Leitz."

"There were—"

The detective cut short his question and uttered a warning "hist!"

A great silence pervaded the place, the woman standing trembling beside him, waiting for his next command.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

Bert Weldon had heard the front door close. He was in a sense in a box. The woman clutched his arm.

"Do not fear. This is what I most desire. Follow me."

The detective was guided by his sense of hearing. He drew the woman cautiously out into the hall then led her to the foot of the stairway leading up to the place where they had first entered.

"You go up and pass to your own home. Wait for me there," he whispered.

Sue Baxter did not delay, but noiselessly ran up the stairs disappearing on the floor above.

The detective stepped to the parlor, gliding to the cover of the portières, behind which he secreted himself. Three men entered the room almost upon his heels. He saw at once that they did not suspect his presence. Then all at once one of the three men, all of whom were well dressed, exclaimed:

"What does this mean? Some one has been here since I went forth."

"Who could have been here?" asked a second voice.

"That is the question."

"I reckon it's your imagination," came the suggestion.

"Possibly it is, and now the question arises, what shall we do? At some time very recently some one has been in this house."

"Could it not have been Arthur?"

"It is possible. He might have come here when he was free."

"But supposing it was not Arthur?"

"It is just possible that an enemy has been in this house."

"I have a recommendation to make. Were I in your place I should remove all the furniture. Since sufficient time has elapsed no comment will be excited, indeed a recollection of the tragedy has almost if not wholly passed from the memory of the public."

"But the question arises, who has been in this—"

At that instant Bert Weldon sneezed. The dust from the portières had brought it forth. Like a flash the light was extinguished, leaving the men in darkness.

A less brave man than our hero would have embraced the opportunity to make his escape. Instead, Bert Weldon drew his flash light and leaped out into the room, throwing a ray of light over the group.

There was a flash and report. A bullet whistled by his head.

"Who's there?" he called, leaping aside at the same instant.

There was no answer. He dared not flash his light again, as the man might shoot, next time with greater accuracy.

The detective waited in a crouching position for fully twenty minutes, then he resolved that he must take a long chance. Drawing his revolver, holding it ready for instant use, he sprang out toward the table, quickly lighted the lamp and dodged down, fully expecting a second shot. But no second shot came.

"Well this beats me," muttered Weldon, when he found that he was alone in the place, the men apparently having made their escape from the house while he was waiting for them to make the next move. "This does beat the Dutch. But I'm going to the bottom of this mystery if it takes all the rest of my life to do it. I will not be baffled in the end."

A new feature had appeared in the series of incidents. Our hero was convinced from the appearance of the three men, that they were not criminals, and yet one of them had certainly fired at him. There was another fact, neither man was the original of the portrait.

The detective sat turning these problems over in his mind when suddenly his eye fell upon a light top coat left hanging over a chair by one of the intruders. It did not take Bert Weldon long to go through the pockets. The only article found in the pockets was a sheet of folded paper covered with writing. Bert took it to the light and read the following missive:

"You had better go through the house, and, if you think it is safe, remove the furniture. But if it is likely to create any comment, let everything stand just as it is. I hope to be in New York in a few weeks. The terrible matter has made an old man of me. You will hardly recognize me, but I do trust it will be safe. Would remove every evidence of what occurred on that fatal night. You said in your letter that everything remained just as we left it when we fled, immediately after the tragedy. Well, well, well, what a scene must meet your gaze when you go through the house. But something must be done. We have been fortunate that discovery has not come upon us. You write me

that you have failed to get any trace of the girl. The chances are that she is dead. How terrible has been that man's revenge, how terrible his end, and what a life of terror I have been compelled to lead. Well, well, the end is at hand."

The note abruptly ended. It had been torn off, as had the address.

"I am drawing just a little closer to the solution of this mystery," mused the detective, "and yet I am confronted with conflicting suggestions. I know, however, that the man who was here tonight, is not a criminal. Perhaps he is a lawyer, the other two being respectable gentlemen. I saw their faces. I shall recognize them if I see them again."

A new thought occurring to the detective, he began searching about for the bullet hole, which he failed to find. He still stood meditating over this when he heard a sound.

Turning sharply he found himself face to face with Sue Baxter.

"You here?" he demanded.

"Yes, I could not stand the anxiety. What has happened?"

"I have passed through quite a startling adventure." Bert then explained all that had occurred. Sharp as were his eyes, hers were sharper. Sue discovered a tiny hole in the ceiling, which proved to be the bullet hole that Weldon had been looking for.

"That confirms part of my theory," nodded the detective.

"Who were the men?"

"I do not know for a certainty, but I have a suspicion." The detective pointed to the overcoat that he had found on the chair.

"Was there anything in the pockets?" she demanded with quick comprehension.

Bert passed the letter to her. The woman read it through.

"What do you think of it?"

"I do not know what to think. Had I not recognized those portraits I should say that this mystery was in no way connected with the death of my husband."

"But you do recognize the portraits?"

"Yes."

He was about to ask a further question when there came an interruption that caused the detective to stop abruptly, thrusting the woman behind him out of sight behind the curtains.

Bert stood waiting for the appearance of men whom he heard coming up the stairs.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNLOOKED FOR INTERRUPTION.

Two men strode into the room, covering Weldon with drawn revolvers.

"We'll take you, Mister Man," announced one.

"No, you won't, Billy."

The fellow started and stared.

"Great guns, Bert, is that you?"

"Sure. But how did you get in here?"

"We walked in."

"Then walk out again, please."

"Certainly, old man," returned Billy Bond with a laugh. "But what does it all mean?"

"I will explain to you some other time. In the meantime tell me how it is you happened to be here?"

"Some day," came the aggravating response.

"It is business, Billy."

"Good night, Bert." The two intruders walked out.

"What are we to do?" questioned the woman emerging from her hiding place.

"I think I know what to do. I have advanced another step."

The couple left the house, but before departing our hero secured the doors on the inside. On the day following our hero met Billy and went into a long explanation. He assigned his comrade a little work, then went down town spending the day in a fruitless ramble about the Wall Street district.

Later in the evening the detective returned to the deserted house. He lay about watching the place until midnight. He was on the point of leaving about midnight when all at once he saw a man approach the house. The man climbed to the stoop, peered in through the window, then after a little walked away. Bert made no attempt to follow. His judgment was verified when a short time afterwards, the man returned. The stranger slid down to the basement and disappeared.

After a brief wait the detective hurried to Sue Baxter's house, making his way up and over the roof to the deserted house. He heard no sound as he descended the stairs in the strange house. Descending to the second floor hall there fell upon his ears a low muttered exclamation.

It was with a stealthy step that the detective went to the front room. The door of the parlor was closed. He peeped in through the key hole. There was a safe in the room. Kneeling before the safe was a man. A masked lantern was standing on a chair, its light directed on the safe. The detective could not see the man's face, but the fellow was drilling the safe lock and he was doing the job with skill.

Bert Weldon was amazed. The truth was he had never before known there was a safe there. As he afterwards learned, the safety chest had been built into the fireplace. It was evident that the intruder knew the house well. Bert did not disturb the man. He determined to let him proceed and blow the safe open.

The drill hole was nearly completed when the man ceased his labors, took his lantern and went to a large mirror. Bert hurried around to the passage between the two rooms where he was able to see through the key hole there. He discovered that the man's face was disguised. The fellow stood before the mirror for some little time.

"I have a great mind to end the whole business," muttered the man, at the same time drawing from his pocket a revolver, which he cocked and stood toying with.

The detective was inclined to rush into the room believing that the man intended to commit suicide. Finally the fellow returned his weapon to his pocket and returned to the safe, after which the detective also returned to his former position at the hall door.

The strange man was inserting a charge in the drill hole, at the same time muttering:

"I must take chances. But supposing I find it, what then?"

The detective's heart almost stood still when he heard the suggestive words—"Supposing I find it, what then?"

The critical moment at length arrived. The man ignited the fuse. Our hero watched the little spark as it crept nearer and nearer to the wad in the drill hole. There came a puff, a dull explosion. The burglar

grasped the handle of the door, throwing it open. With feverish haste he began pulling out the drawers. Bert could see that they were empty. There was nothing in them.

Bert Weldon had decided to act. Masking his face he stepped into the room. The burglar sprang to his feet.

"Hello, cully, you're ahead of me," exclaimed the detective.

The burglar made no reply, but stood staring.

"Yes, you got on this ahead of me. What's your haul?"

"Who are you?" demanded the intruder hoarsely.

"I reckon we can't stop to introduce ourselves, but I'm in with you and don't you forget it. Off with your mask. I want to see your face."

The burglar threw himself on the detective and instantly the men were engaged in a desperate struggle. Bert at once made the discovery that he had taken on a most powerful man.

"Hold on, cully, you and I must not quarrel," cried the officer.

"I'll kill you!" came the breathless response.

"Why should you kill me? I am your friend."

"Bah! I've got no friends—I need no friends!"

There was something singularly strange in the man's tones, and his emphasis as he spoke, was also most suggestive.

"Why should we maul each other, cully? We should be friends, we will attract the police."

Bert was slowly getting the better of the burglar when the latter exclaimed:

"Haul off or I'll kill you!"

"Will you be quiet?"

"Yes."

Our hero as he caught a glimpse of his opponent's face, uttered an exclamation of amazement, quickly releasing his hold and leaping to his feet. The instant he was released the fellow sprang from the room, dashing down the stairs and out into the street. Bert followed, but in his haste he tripped and fell, his head coming in contact with a newel post which stunned him for a moment. When finally he had regained his feet he dashed out to the stoop, but the burglar had disappeared.

Bert after locking the door, returned to the safe. He failed to find anything in it after a most careful examination, but in drawing his arm from a compartment intended as a book rack, something rattled out and fell to the floor. Bert seized his lamp, flashing the light over the carpet, when an answering flash met his gaze. The article that he had dragged forth was a ring holding a large solitaire diamond. The detective placed the ring on his finger. After a more thorough search through the safe the detective closed and shoved it back into place, after which he returned to Sue Baxter's home.

"What has happened? Why, your head is cut?" she demanded.

The detective had not observed that his head was bleeding. He held it toward the light. As he did so the jewel upon his finger glittered and flashed in the light like a ball of fire.

The woman's glances fell upon the ring. She uttered a scream, clutching the detective's arm.

"Where did you get that ring?"

"Did you never notice that before?" answered Weldon coolly:

"Never!" answered the woman, her voice trembling with agitation.

"You never saw that ring before?"

"I have seen that ring before, but not on your finger," came the reply.

"On whose finger?"

"One moment. I may be mistaken. If I am not, inside that ring you will find the initials 'A. H.'"

The detective removed the ring and there inside it as the woman had said, were the initials "A. H."

"Where did you see that ring before?" he demanded.

"On my husband's finger. It belonged to him. Those are his initials."

"Let me think—was his given name Arthur?"

"It was."

"Ah, a light is breaking in upon me."

"Answer me, did you find that ring in the deserted house? If so it tells the tale—it confirms your theory that my husband was murdered there."

"Sue, I have a question to put to you, did you see your husband's body after his death?"

"I did. When he lay in his coffin at the undertaker's. That was four days after his death."

"Did you recognize him?"

"No one recognized him. His face was terribly mutilated. He was recognized by papers found on his person and a locket also."

"Did you ever doubt its being the body of your husband?"

"Never."

The detective paced the floor for several silent minutes. Strange, wild theories were running through his mind.

"Why do you ask?" demanded Sue Baxter.

"Because I believe there is a great question concerning the identification of your husband's body," answered the detective impressively.

CHAPTER X.

BERT VOICES HIS DOUBTS.

Sue's agitation became intense. She glared at the detective almost wildly.

"Do not trifle with me. What am I to hear?"

"I can tell you nothing, for I know nothing. Tomorrow I may draw nearer to a solution."

"But, tell me, have you good reasons to doubt the murder of my husband?"

"I have not said so."

"You said there was a question as to the identity of the body?"

"I did say so, but Sue, I will talk with you tomorrow."

"Did you really find the ring on the floor in that house?"

"I did."

"I will go to that house."

"Sue, you will do nothing of the sort. Tomorrow night we may go there together."

"But suppose my husband is not dead?"

"I do not dare suggest that he is not dead."

"I know now that you believe he is living, and if he is, who was the man murdered?"

Bert Weldon did not answer at once.

"You have grounds for your suspicion?"

"Well, yes. Merely the possibility that there was a mistake in the identification."

The detective left Sue Baxter's house soon after that.

He made some further investigations, including a visit to Eva Wills in which the latter told of having received a visit from a strange woman who wished her to visit the woman's house to hear some strange revelations. Bert advised the fair young girl to accept, telling her that no harm should come to her. Later in the day Weldon met a man from Boston, a famous detective from Boston, named Jake Reed. It developed that Jake had been employed to watch the mysterious house where our hero had had so many exciting experiences.

From Jake our hero learned some facts that led him to make an early trip down town on the following morning. Bert had obtained considerable information in various directions, which it has not been necessary to present here in advance.

Bert took up his position opposite a certain office door in a well known office building. As it turned out he had timed himself to a nicety. A gentleman ascended the stairs, entering the office. Bert recognized the man at a glance. It was the dark-faced man he had seen in the deserted house upon the occasion when the detective had been shot at.

There was but one name on the door of the office—the name of Horace Elger. Bert entered the office boldly. He saw his man sitting in a rear office, but from where he was sitting the lawyer commanded a view of the door. Bert coolly locked it. As he did so the lawyer leaped to his feet, demanding:

"Who are you, what do you want, why did you lock that door? How dare you?"

"Keep perfectly quiet, sir, I came here to consult you."

"How dare you lock that door?"

"I do not wish to be disturbed."

"You are a thief. I shall give an alarm!"

"Do not give an alarm and do not alarm yourself, sir."

The detective threw back the lapel of his coat, displaying his badge.

"You are an officer?"

"I am an officer, and if you give an alarm you will be very sorry. I am here on private business."

"What is your name?"

Bert Weldon tossed a card to the lawyer. He did not dare to advance and hand the card over, fearing the man would get terror-stricken and call for help. The lawyer read the name "Herbert Weldon, Detective," on the card.

"You are Mr. Weldon?"

"I am."

"I have heard of you, sir. You have business with me?"

"I have very important business with you, sir."

"Take a seat."

"Ah, now you talk like a lawyer," smiled the detective. "Mr. Elger, I have come here for information. You know the identity of the owner of the house at No. 22—avenue?"

The lawyer gave a start.

"How do you know that?"

"I know you are and I want to obtain the owner's address."

"You can obtain no information from me."

"I am an officer, sir. It is time this mystery was solved."

"What mystery?"

"A murder was committed in that house, and immediately afterward, its former occupants fled. From

that time the house has been vacant, indeed, so precipitate was the departure of the assassins that they did not even stop to clean up the blood stains. The furniture was left all in confusion as it had been overturned during the mêlée. That mystery must be cleared up."

"If you can clear away the mystery you are at liberty to do so."

"Yes, sir, I am and that is my business here this morning and you can aid me."

"You are mistaken."

"I know better."

"Very well, sir, you are at liberty to adopt your own methods."

"And you refuse to aid me?"

"I do. I have nothing to say."

"You will maintain this position?"

"I certainly shall."

"Then, sir, my duty is plain. All I have to do is to arrest you. I will perform my duty and let the consequences follow."

The lawyer paled ever so little, at the same time betraying considerable nervousness. Bert recognized his advantage.

"You will arrest me?"

"I will."

"It cannot be possible that you realize who you are talking to, my friend?"

"I fully recognize who I am talking to. I will admit your well-known respectability, I am aware that you fully understand the law in the case. So do I, and further, I know the charge upon which I shall make the arrest. I will make the arrest. It will hold until you make full explanations. I think you can. The only question is, will you make them publicly or privately to me? If you adopt the latter, I think you will be well pleased in the end, as together we may solve this mystery."

"What mystery?"

"There has been a murder committed."

The lawyer thought a moment, then said:

"You are laboring under a great hallucination, Mr. Weldon."

"Then, if that is so you can dispel the hallucination, but as the matter stands the affair has a bad look."

"But how do you connect me with it?"

"You were at the house the other night and I overheard words that connected you with the tragedy."

"You—you overheard words that connected me with the tragedy?" repeated the lawyer.

"I did."

"And where were you?"

"In the same house."

"What were you doing there?"

"I have been seeking to solve the mystery for a long time. I have been watching the house. I was the man you shot at. Fortunately I escaped with my life."

"Your life was not in danger."

"Why was I shot at?"

"No shot was fired at you. There was a shot fired to frighten some one off, and it seems you claim to have been the man."

"I was the man. You and your friends ran off as though you believed you were in danger."

"We mistook you for a burglar."

"Ah, I see, and now, Mr. Elger, why not come to a full explanation? You wish to find the child, you

probably have been years seeking that child. I can aid you. I can put my hand on that child at any moment."

The lawyer stared when the detective made the startling declaration.

"The child? What child?"

The detective passed over the fragment of the letter he had found in the overcoat. The lawyer read it and after some moments spent in reflection, said:

"You are really Mr. Weldon?"

"I am."

"I know of you through your reputation. What is your interest in this case?"

The detective had by this time read the lawyer through and through. He had arrived at the conclusion that Mr. Elger was an honorable man.

"I believe, sir, that you are an honorable man," began Bert. "I will tell you a strange and remarkable story which will explain my connection with this matter. I must exact, however, a sacred professional promise that you will repeat nothing of what I am about to tell you without my permission."

"I give the promise, Mr. Weldon."

The detective proceeded to relate all that had occurred from the moment that he had met the girl Eva Wells up to the time when he found himself confronting the lawyer. The latter listened with rapt attention. At the conclusion of the narrative, he said:

"This is all very remarkable."

"It is, sir."

"You have acted with a great deal of discretion."

"I have tried to do so."

The detective had mentioned no names. He had merely detailed the facts and incidents, suppressing all names.

"The young lady is under your protection?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Weldon, I think you are entitled to know all the facts," announced the lawyer after some reflection.

"I think so, sir."

"You have been frank with me?"

"I have, sir."

"I will tell you a remarkable story."

"Proceed, sir."

"There resided in England a miserly old merchant. He was a bachelor, having accumulated a large sum of money. He had a nephew whom he supported. This nephew was the orphan son of a sister. He was a wild boy, causing his relatives a great deal of anxiety and distress. As it afterwards appeared, the old man left a will cutting off this nephew with a shilling, leaving the bulk of his property to the son of a former business associate. Previous to his death, however, he had established the fact that his nephew was not a relative. He produced sworn affidavits from his sister saying that the lad Arthur was only an adopted child. This young man Arthur Howard was a reckless young man and when he found he had been cut off he fled the country. At the same time the infant daughter of one James Creevey was stolen."

"Who was James Creevey?" interrupted the detective.

"He was the man who had inherited the property."

"And it was supposed that Arthur had stolen the child?"

"Yes."

"Is it so believed in this country?"

"Yes."

"Wait," said the detective. He spent some time making notes of certain facts that had been related to him. "Please go on."

"Mr. Creevey came to America. He had received an intimation that his child had been carried to America. He purchased property here in New York, devoting himself to a search for his daughter. He failed to find the child, but did discover the man Arthur Howard Creeveling, as his full name is. He began to follow the man up. In the meantime Arthur claimed that there was a suppressed will. He claimed that his uncle had, previous to the latter's death, recanted the charges that Arthur was a foundling, and he offered to restore the child on condition that the property was made over to him. Mr. Creevey offered to divide the property, but Arthur refused to make any compromise.

"Then followed a bitter war between the two men. Arthur resorted to all manner of devices to secure the supposed will and vindication."

"Let me ask you one question, sir," said the detective. "Did any such vindication and will exist?"

"That is a question I cannot answer."

"What do you suspect?"

"I suspect nothing. I know nothing, indeed I know but little about Mr. Creevey, although I am his agent."

"How about the murder in number 22?"

"I am coming to an explanation of that mystery," was the reply.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERY OPENS.

"What connection do you establish between the man Arthur Howard Creeveling and the robber, the notorious burglar Arthur Howard?"

"Ah, there is a mystery I cannot solve."

"Proceed with your narrative."

Mr. Elger continued, relating many little facts in detail that are not necessary to repeat here, but he did say that finally Mr. Creevey determined to make a final offer to young Creeveling. He caused a lady who had acted for the pretended heir several times, to write him a note requesting an interview. Young Creeveling appeared. A proposition was made which he refused. Mr. Creevey had a friend present."

"Who was this friend?" demanded the detective.

"I have never heard. All that I know is that a row occurred between this friend and young Arthur Creeveling. A fight followed, Arthur was thrown down, his head struck the edge of a heavy table. He rolled over with it, and it was at first supposed that he was dead. Under restoratives he showed signs of life. He was removed from the house and taken to a private hospital where he lay for more than three months and where he regained his health. But it was discovered that he was hopelessly insane. He was taken to an asylum where he has remained ever since."

"You are sure he has remained there?"

"He remained there up to a few weeks ago."

"He is now at large?"

"Yes."

"Sane or insane?"

"The physician at the asylum says it is his belief that the man's reason has returned. He was under treatment all the time, and it is possible the treatment has proved successful."

"We have not yet established the connection between the famous burglar and Arthur Creeveling."

"No, but we have established this connection—the famous burglar is claimed to have been killed that same night and his body was found. But he was not killed in number 22. There was no connection between the two tragic occurrences."

"Well," remarked the detective, "we are deeper in the mystery than ever."

"So it would appear."

Bert then told of his meeting with the man who had broken into the safe at the mysterious house.

"That must have been Arthur Creeveling," exclaimed the lawyer.

"How is it Mr. Creevey never returned to his home?"

"He was so dreadfully shocked at the occurrence. He fled from the house with his wife that very night. He has never entered it since."

The detective had made copious notes of the revelation he had listened to, and finally said:

"We have not established the fact that the girl who is the supposed daughter of the burglar, is in reality the daughter of Mr. Creevey?"

"No."

"There is but one way to establish that fact."

"How can we do it?"

"By capturing this man Arthur Creeveling. We can go no further in this matter until I find him."

"You can do so?"

"I can and will, and until you hear from me again, take no steps in this matter. Say nothing to the gentleman, Mr. Creevey, and leave all to me. Let the house at number 22 stand as it is and I will guarantee to solve this whole dark mystery in a few days."

The detective desired to get away and carefully digest the facts he had obtained. He agreed to meet Mr. Elger on the following day, then left, proceeding to his own home.

Once alone in his own room, Bert Weldon took out the notes and studied over all the facts. In due time he reached a conclusion, formed on a most plausible theory. Few men would have been able to work out so fine a problem.

Later in the day the detective set out to visit Eva Wells. He was now satisfied that the girl was really the daughter of the dead burglar and in no way connected with the mysterious Arthur Creeveling. The fact that bothered him was the real identity of the dead burglar. It was with keen regret that he was forced also to the conclusion that he had revived false hopes in the mind of the woman Sue Baxter. He was fully convinced as a final conclusion, that she was the widow of the dead robber. And then again, how about the fact that she had met her husband in the house of the Creevey people?

"It is a case of resemblance," at length concluded our hero. Still, there were several singular contradictions to his theories after all.

Reaching the home of Eva he found the young girl greatly excited.

"I am glad you have come," she cried.

"I suppose you received your strange visitor again?"

"Yes, I received a strange visitor, but not again." The girl laid emphasis on the last two words.

"What do you mean?"

"I received a second strange visitor."

"A woman?"

"No, a man came here."

"A man?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it?"

"Last evening a man came to this house—an old man. He asked to see my aunt. He was admitted and he told her the strangest story you ever heard."

"What did he tell her?"

"He told her I was the daughter of a wealthy man, that my parents had been seeking me for years. He said I had been stolen in infancy, and brought to this country from England."

Bert Weldon was all knocked-out upon hearing this strange and startling statement.

"Did he give your aunt any particulars?"

"No, sir."

"Did he see and talk with you?"

"He did. I was present during a part of the conversation with my aunt."

"He gave no particulars?"

"No, sir."

"It is a ridiculous story, I fear."

"We cannot tell, but he is to come here again."

"When?"

"To-night."

"At what time?"

"At eight o'clock."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DETECTIVE PUZZLED.

"So he is to come here to-night, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he give you his name?"

"I did not hear it."

"Nor any further information?"

"No, sir."

"Did he appear to be an honest man?"

"I did not examine him very closely. I was too excited over what he was saying to take great notice."

"It is all right, my child. I will remain here and meet this strange man when he comes again to-night."

"Oh, I am so glad."

"Possibly I may be able to induce him to go into particulars, to make a clearer statement of what he means. However, Eva, do not delude yourself with false hopes. It is doubtful if our friend was telling a true story. His may have been another and more despicable motive."

"Yes, sir."

The detective worked a clever disguise. He made himself up as an old woman. It was a perfect disguise at that. His best friend never would have recognized him in it. Eva was delighted. Bert told Eva's aunt that she should say to the visitor that she desired her mother to talk with him. It was arranged that this should be done.

The little party waited in the parlor, full of expectancy and anticipation. Eva was gleeful. There was something in the air that seemed to affect each alike.

There came a knock on the door.

"There he is," cried Eva in a suppressed voice.

"Admit him," ordered the detective.

As the door was opened, Eva left the room. Our hero under his disguise, remained in the parlor.

A few minutes later a seeming old man was shown into the room. He was introduced to the disguised de-

tective, but the instant his eyes fell upon our hero he turned on his heel, rushed to the door and disappeared.

All had happened so quickly that those present hardly realized what had occurred until it was too late to remedy the misfortune.

"He's gone!" cried Eva's aunt.

"Well, that's a go," exclaimed the detective.

"Why did he do a thing like that?"

"I am sure I don't know. His actions were very strange indeed. He did not even sit down, but took flight the instant he set eyes on me."

"Yes," agreed the aunt.

Weldon fell to the fact promptly that the man was no fool. He had as the term goes "tumbled" and that was the reason why he had tumbled out of sight so quickly.

Bert did not attempt to follow the old man, but let him go.

Our hero felt assured that he could get on to him later on, and as the detective had another little scheme that he desired to carry through, he was well satisfied.

Eva returned to the room soon after.

"Why, has he gone?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes, he took French leave," laughed the detective.

"What has become of him?"

"I will answer by asking another. What has become of your lady visitor of the other day?" asked the detective.

"She is to come here tomorrow morning."

"You have an appointment with her?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is well."

"I took your advice, sir."

"You did right. And now, listen to me, Eva. I believe we are nearing the end of this whole affair. At least I hope so for the sake of each of you. The mystery concerning yourself will soon be solved, and in the meantime I desire to establish the innocence of the young man Sidney Murray."

Eva flushed deeply.

Bert Weldon had a deep design in all his movements. He was fully satisfied that Eva Wells was really an heiress.

Then too, he had become deeply interested in the young man Sidney Murray. He anticipated, that should Eva be restored to her parents and installed as an heiress, her new-found parents would naturally object to her marriage with the young man who loved her.

The detective was determined to forestall any such result. He proposed to prove the young man's innocence, then satisfy Eva as to her parentage negatively. We will say he proposed that the marriage should take place after which the parents should be reunited with their child.

Bert was a man of the world. After all his plan might not have been justified altogether, but he proposed to act in accordance with his own ideas of what was right.

He had met with a love disappointment of his own, indeed his disappointment had been a great one. This fact made him the more sympathetic.

"So the strange woman is to call here tomorrow, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"You seem to be having more than your share of strange callers?" laughed Weldon.

"I think so, sir," smiled the girl.
 "She wishes you to visit a certain house?"
 "I think so."
 "That was what she told you when she was here before, was it not," questioned the detective.
 "Oh, yes, sir."
 "That is all right, I want you to agree to meet her."
 "But I am to go to the other house at night."
 "Very good."
 "She is to call for me in a carriage."
 "Excellent. You agree to go."
 "I may be running into danger."
 "That is so, but I shall be on hand to protect you."
 "Why should I invite peril?"
 "You wish the innocence of Sidney Murray to be established?"
 "I do," answered the girl fervently.
 "So do I and by this little scheme we will succeed in proving his innocence."
 "I cannot understand how."
 "But I can. All that is necessary is that you should act with a little nerve. There is another thing that I wish to speak with you about. Will you answer a question?"
 "Certainly. I always answer you frankly."
 "How is it you never mention to me the name of Sidney Murray? I always have to refer to the subject myself."
 "Well, there has been no need to mention his name. I have thought a great deal over a remark you made to me in this connection."
 "Indeed, what was the remark?"
 "You asked me what I would do if it should turn out that Sidney Murray was really a guilty man."
 "Well?"
 "I think you have reasons for that remark."
 "You do?"
 "Yes."
 "Have you heard anything to strengthen your suspicion?"
 The girl did not answer immediately.
 "Come, answer me," insisted the detective.
 "I called upon his late employer. He thought a great deal of Sidney. He told me he had absolute proof of the young man's guilt."
 "Did he?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, my dear child, I have absolute proof to the contrary."
 The girl's face brightened.
 "Have you seen Sidney?"
 "I have."
 "And he has proved his innocence?"
 "I have satisfied myself that he is innocent, as I already have told you, and your part in establishing the proof begins when you go to that woman's house with her. He is a worthy young man and there is no reason why you should not become his wife."
 "There is a reason," murmured the girl her face paling.
 "What is the reason?"
 "My own position."
 "And what is your position?"
 "If I am the daughter of a notorious burglar, I can never become Sidney's wife."
 "But supposing he is willing to take you just the same?"
 "It will make no difference."

"Simply because the day would surely come when he would regret his act. No, I will never marry a man until my own identity as to my relations to my fellow beings is well established. But I am anxious to have Sidney vindicated."

"If you feel that way you should not see him again." The girl's face fell.
 "There can be no harm in my seeing him."
 "Oh yes, there is great harm."
 "How so?"
 "You are considering yourself alone, you are not regarding his feelings."

"I did not think of that," answered Eva, growing very red.

"The young man idolizes you."

"He does?"
 "Yes."

"How is it you are so well acquainted with his feelings?" she demanded a little maliciously.

"I am an observer. We will now return to the previous subject of discussion. We have much to talk over before other things are gone through with. We will leave Sidney out of the discussion for the moment."

CHAPTER XIII. LAYING A NEAT TRAP.

The detective then proceeded to relate to the girl, his suspicions regarding the visitor, pointing out at the same time how he would use the adventure to the furtherance of their plans.

Eva was bright, quick and brave, and again she was more than anxious to serve the young man who loved her.

"You can depend upon me," she said after they had conversed long and in great detail.

"I am sure of that, my dear. You are a brave girl. I know that our young friend will have reason to feel proud of you for your interest in proving his innocence. But he is worth it."

Eva blushed.

"This may prove a very trying ordeal," he warned.

"I am ready for it. I do not fear. I know you will be near to aid me in case of peril."

"Good enough. You may depend upon me. Now listen."

"Yes, sir."

"When this strange woman calls on you tomorrow, you will reluctantly consent to go with her."

"Yes, sir."

"Remember, reluctantly. Do not consent willingly or she may suspect. We are dealing with two bunglers who are behind her and we will have some fun."

"I hope so, sir. There has been enough sadness."

"Tut, tut, none of that. A young woman like you to talk of sadness. But—"

The detective went into fuller details than he had done before, in laying out his instructions. He arranged a code of signals, and in every possible way fortified the fair young girl for the ordeal.

It was late in the evening when Bert Weldon left the house. He proceeded direct to his own lodgings. Reaching there he had a long talk with Sidney Murray.

"Young man," he began. "After tomorrow I believe you will be able to walk the streets a free man."

Sidney's face glowed.

"That is splendid news, sir. I hope it may be true."

"It will be true. You have my word for it."

"I never shall be able to repay the debt I owe you, Mr. Weldon."

"We will let that pass. There is one other matter that I wish to discuss with you."

"Yes, sir."

"This girl Eva Wells, you are prepared to make her your wife?"

"I should say I am if she will consent to become my wife."

"You are prepared to marry her at once?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have good reasons for not wishing to marry at once."

The detective eyed the young man almost sternly. At length he said:

"You suspect the truth?"

"What truth?"

"You fear she is the daughter of a criminal?"

"I do not care whose daughter she is. That makes no difference to me. That is not my reason."

"Then why no marry her at once?"

"I am a penniless man."

"Oh, is that all?"

"Yes."

"Is that your only reason for not wishing to enter into a marriage with Miss Wells at once?"

"Yes."

"Otherwise, you would marry her?"

"If she would have me, in a minute."

"Very well, I will see that the marriage takes place," announced Bert Weldon calmly.

"What?"

"Did you not understand?"

"What do you mean?"

"I said I would see to it that the marriage took place as mentioned."

"You will see that the marriage takes place?" repeated the young man in a tone of amazement.

"Yes, I will see that it takes place at once."

"Will you kindly explain what you mean?"

"I do not believe in long engagements."

"One would think it was yourself who was to be married," laughed Sidney Murray.

"Stranger things have happened," mused Bert.

"But, I am penniless, I tell you worse than penniless. I shall have no position, some people will still suspect me—"

"Not when I am through with this case," interrupted the detective.

"I could not marry if I would—"

"Leave that matter to me, young man. I am not entirely without resource as you no doubt have observed by this time."

"I should say so."

"Supposing you were restored to your old position?"

"That would be a great encouragement indeed."

"Suppose your late employer should indemnify you for your past sufferings?"

"No, I should not demand anything of the sort."

"All right. You and I will talk over this matter twenty-four hours from now."

"Why twenty-four hours from now?"

"Because I shall have something to say to you by

that time, I trust, something of an encouraging nature, and that will bring you great happiness."

"Can you not tell me now?"

"No."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because the time has not yet arrived."

"This suspense will be worse than the other."

"Sidney, have no fears. All will be well. I have promised that your innocence shall be proved. In fact it is practically proved now, all but the publicity. It has been necessary in the interest of other ends of this strange affair that your matter be allowed to rest. Tomorrow it will be taken up in earnest. You shall know your fate ere you sleep tomorrow night!"

"Thank God!" breathed the young man fervently.

The two men discussed the matter more in detail for a long time after that, though Bert refrained from giving the young man a hint of what Eva Wells was doing for him, to save him. He preferred that that information should come at a more fitting time.

Later on Bert Weldon took his departure, to his own rooms, where he spent a great part of the night in arranging his plans and working out his theories.

On the following day the detective arrayed himself for a "shadow." He proceeded to the home of Eva Wells.

Bert had been there but a short time before he saw a woman enter the house.

"All goes well," muttered the famous detective nodding his head with keen satisfaction. "Now we shall see what we shall see."

CHAPTER XIV. A DIABOLICAL SCHEME.

The woman remained in the Wells' house for some time.

Bert waited until he saw her emerge from the house and hurry away. And though the detective had not seen her face, he recognized the woman almost instantly. He realized that his original conclusions were correct beyond the question of a doubt.

"Horrible!" he exclaimed.

Bert Weldon fell to the trail of the woman after she left the house. The trail led him to a very handsome house, but located in a doubtful neighborhood, and as he saw her disappear within the house he muttered:

"Ah, it is as I thought. This is a most diabolical scheme. How many similar schemes are carried out in this great, wicked city—how many meet success? Yes, the river throwing up its dead testifies when too late to the city's criminal business."

"But in this one, the devil, will be beaten. I am on hand and I will drive one wicked creature out of New York if it be the last thing I ever do. I will teach a miserable young villain a lesson that will last him the rest of his life, as I shall do to an elderly villain of the same character."

"Yes," continued the detective shaking his fist menacingly. "I will settle this fellow Sparks. I'll stop his career in New York, and this young fool Gwin shall also hie from the city never to return again, as long as I carry this shield. If he does, it is prison for him unless I decide to break every bone in his body instead."

The detective hung about for an hour or more when he discovered two men emerging from the house.

"It's the scoundrel Sparks and his pal Gwin," muttered the detective. A smile spread over the face of

the officer. "Well, well, won't I have some fun tonight, won't I teach those devils a lesson? Oh, somebody hold me!"

Bert did not follow the men. In the first place he hardly dared trust himself to do so, fearing that he should forget himself and beat them up. Then again he had them down fine enough. He knew that when the time came, the matter would end as he had planned it should.

The detective proceeded to the office of Mr. Elder downtown. The lawyer was out, but the officer was used to long waits, so he just sat around for another hour. The lawyer entered, accompanied by a very pleasant-faced gentleman—a very timid man, as our hero read at a glance.

The two gentlemen entered the lawyer's office and a few minutes later, the detective followed them.

"Ah," exclaimed the lawyer, "I am glad you are here. Mr. Weldon, permit me to introduce you to Mr. Creevey."

The gentleman introduced as Mr. Creevey, appeared greatly discomfited, and indeed agitated. But our hero's genial manner soon put the man more at ease.

"I am very glad to meet you," said Bert. "You have reason to be very hopeful, Mr. Creevey. I have wanted to meet you for some time. There is no need for you to feel embarrassed."

The gentleman merely bowed his head, making no reply.

"And now I wish you to nerve yourself, sir. Be prepared for a surprise. I am not boasting when I say I hope and fondly expect that it will prove a joyful surprise, though it may prove an equally bitter disappointment. Let me ask you, sir, have you a photograph of your missing child?"

Mr. Creevey still did not reply. The lawyer however, spoke up for him.

"I have a photograph here, but it was taken when Eva was only three years old. It will not be of much use to you, I imagine."

"So much the better."

"I do not understand how?"

"I know, sir."

"It certainly cannot now serve as an identification picture. It is so many years ago since it was taken. The original must now be a young lady."

"We shall see," said our hero. "Come with me, sir, to the adjoining office if Mr. Creevey will excuse us."

Mr. Creevey nodded his assent, whereupon the lawyer accompanied the detective to the inner office.

"One fact is assured—well assured," said Weldon the moment the lawyer had closed the door of the inner office.

"What fact is that, sir?"

"The long lost daughter of that man is indeed under my protection."

"You are quite sure of this?"

"I am positive."

"Then this is great news, indeed, if you are able to substantiate your words with proof."

"I can. But there is one thing more, I do not wish to surrender the girl at once."

The lawyer shot an inquiring glance at his companion.

"Why not?" he demanded almost sharply.

"There may come a disappointment to the father."

The face of Mr. Elger fell.

"Ah, it is as I feared."

"As you feared?" demanded the detective.

"Yes."

"What did you fear?"

"You can well imagine the possible fate that might have come to a motherless and helpless girl. I see now that you are preparing me to hear that my worst fears have been realized."

"You may dismiss your fears in that direction," replied Bert with a smile.

"I am surprised."

"The girl is in every way worthy of any position in life, but there may follow a disappointment all the same, in fact I am quite positive there will."

"Will you explain what you mean, Mr. Weldon?"

"She is a wife."

"A wife?"

"Yes."

"Married?"

"Married."

"Honorable?"

"Certainly, sir. I told you she was a pure young woman, and I might add a noble girl."

"I do not see that under the circumstances, this can be any very great disappointment," said the lawyer with a sigh of relief.

"The Creeveys are persons of high social standing, are they not?"

"Oh, yes, I believe so, but the recovery of their daughter should be a sufficient joy to overcome any feeling of disappointment, if, as you say she is married to a worthy man."

"This is your idea?"

"Yes."

"Will the father look upon it in the same way?"

"I think so."

"That will simplify matters."

"Ah, but we have no proof yet that you really have discovered the girl for whom we are searching."

"I can furnish the proofs."

"Do so."

"You have the photograph?"

"Yes, I have it."

"I have not seen it yet."

"I will show it to you."

"No, wait, I propose to show you one first of all."

"To show me one?" wondered the lawyer.

"Yes."

The detective handed over a picture, one that Eva's aunt had secured shortly after the child had come into her possession.

The instant the lawyer's eyes fell upon the picture he uttered an exclamation.

"Sir," he demanded, "is this a picture of the girl now under your protection?"

"Ah, I thought so," nodded Bert Weldon. "Now listen, I do not wish the father to know immediately that this daughter is found."

"That is a very strange request."

"I have my reasons for making it."

"What are those reasons?"

"I am not prepared to state them at the moment. We can hold out hope to him, but we must not confirm the news."

"This is indeed a strange stipulation," said the lawyer in a suspicious tone.

"See here," said the detective.

He presented a picture taken when the child was eight years old.

"Do you recognize that?"

"Well, Well," muttered the lawyer. "This passes all comprehension."

"And again, see here."

The detective now handed over a picture taken a few years later, and finally he presented one taken only a few months previously.

"Are you convinced?"

As the lawyer glanced at the last picture he exclaimed:

"You are a wonderful man. Is this as she appears to-day?"

"To-day?"

The lawyer nodded.

"Yes, taken only a few months ago and represents Eva almost as she appears at this moment."

"Then there can be no doubt now."

"I told you there was none."

"I must show these pictures to Mr. Creevey," said the lawyer rising.

"No, sir, you will please do nothing of the sort."

"What shall we do? This is cruel to make the father suffer more than he already has. I repeat, what shall we do?"

"Tell him," answered Bert after a brief reflection, "that we have every reason to believe that his daughter is found and that in due time she shall be placed in his arms."

"Very well, sir. I do not know what your motive may be, but I shall be guided by your judgment in the matter. You are in possession of the facts, you surely must know what is best for all persons concerned."

"I do, sir. You will find that I do."

CHAPTER XV.

AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW.

Mr. Elger, as stated, finally agreed to the detective's proposition, but not fully until the latter had first made certain explanations.

The two men then returned to the presence of Mr. Creevey. The detective stated the case as had been agreed upon between himself and the lawyer.

Mr. Creevey was deeply agitated, and Bert was almost forced through sympathy, to blurt out the truth. He restrained himself, however. There were tears in Mr. Creevey's eyes. His hopes were raised almost to the skies.

The detective spoke.

"I requested Mr. Elger to ask you on here from Boston for reasons other than those connected with your daughter. I wished to ask you some questions."

"Yes, sir."

"Some questions about this man Arthur Howard Creeveling."

Mr. Creevey exhibited no little trepidation. He trembled violently and his face grew almost ashen.

"You had best answer," suggested the lawyer.

"You need have no fears, sir," encouraged Weldon. "I am your friend. Mr. Elger has imparted to me all the information in his possession. I desire to do the same to you."

"Then you know?"

The detective nodded.

"I will speak frankly, sir," said Mr. Creevey after a few moments' silent thought.

"That is well. You know this young man believes he has been wronged—grievously wronged?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it true?"

For a moment the man did not answer. When he did so he spoke in an almost inaudible tone of voice. Bert was obliged to ask him to repeat his answer in a louder tone.

"I do not think he has been wronged, sir."

The detective nodded.

"Was he or was he not the nephew of the man from whom you inherited your fortune?"

"He was not," was the emphatic reply.

"You are quite sure of this?"

"I am sure."

"He claims there are proofs in your possession—proofs showing that he was. He also claims that there is a will in your possession, a will making him the real heir. Are those statements true?"

"Both claims are groundless."

"You know whereof you speak?"

"I do."

"Please give me the real facts."

"I will do so."

"Proceed."

"Arthur Howard Creeveling is of good birth. His parents were honorable people. His father was a curate, and his mother the daughter of a counsellor. Both died young, and the sister of my father's former partner adopted the child."

"Legally adopted him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Proceed."

"The facts were always known to many people. He was reared as a son and nephew. However, as I have said, it was well known to many who his real parents were. Had he been a good young man he would have received a part of the estate."

"Was he always wild?"

"Yes. My father and his partner were half brothers. This fact was not known. I am really the heir at law! I am the real nephew, and what is more, my uncle wronged my father. The wrong was righted only in bequeathing his property to me. I offered one half of the estate to Arthur on condition that he would restore my child."

"And he refused?"

"He did. He would not accept."

"What did he claim?"

"The whole estate."

"Why did your uncle cut him off?"

"I have promised to tell the whole truth, and I shall."

"Yes," nodded the detective encouragingly.

"Arthur committed a forgery for a large sum of money. My uncle refused to take up the bill and Arthur became a fugitive. He has been hunted and pursued by officers of the law ever since."

A silence settled over the room. Bert Weldon was thinking deeply. At last he resumed his questioning.

"Is Arthur living?"

"I have every reason to believe that he is."

"You do not know for certain, of course?"

"No."

"How about the man who was murdered?"

"I believe that was merely a similarity of names."

"Did you ever see the man who was known as the famous burglar?"

"I did."

"When and where?"

"He was up for trial and I saw him then."

"Did you discover any resemblance between the two men?"

"Yes, a slight resemblance."

"Was the real Arthur Creeveling a burglar to your knowledge, sir?"

"I do not know."

"What is your opinion?"

"I cannot say as to that. I do know, however, that he was once sentenced and served a term in prison."

"He did?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what?"

"I cannot say at this moment."

"There is a mystery here?" said our hero.

"There is."

"Do you believe the real Arthur Creeveling to be a bad man at heart—a really bad man?"

"He stole my child. Is that not enough?"

"You know that of your own knowledge?"

"He admitted it."

"In so many words?"

"Well, no, by his actions."

"But do you believe he was a criminal in the real sense of the word?"

"He had committed a forgery, you know?"

"That was when he was a very young man?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Creevey, you know well what I am trying to bring out, don't you?"

"I think so, sir."

"Do you believe he has since led a life of crime—the life of a desperate hardened criminal?"

"Frankly, I do."

"That is certainly to the point. But of course you do not know of your own knowledge what crimes he committed, if any?"

"No, sir."

Bert Weldon then held a more extended talk with the gentleman. The detective soon after that took his departure, promising to report in a few days, the result of his research.

After leaving the lawyer's office, Bert started along up Broadway, turning over in his mind what he had heard that morning.

On the way he passed a man whom he discovered in a flash was under a disguise. A second glance brought a more startling suspicion.

The detective started on the man's track at once. He followed the fellow from place to place, and at last saw him enter one of those common hotels and lodging houses on the Bowery. The man secured a key and ascended to his room. A moment later the detective made himself known to the clerk of the hotel, demanding to know the number of the guest's room. This was given to him, after which the detective ascended the stairs.

The room the guest had entered was on the top floor. Bert found all the doors of the adjoining rooms open, and was therefore pleased to conclude that the man he sought was the only lodger on that floor. This simplified matters considerably, for the detective had laid his plans well.

Weldon watched the door of the lodger's room for a short time, then advancing, knocked on the door.

There came no immediate response. He knocked again, then came the demand:

"Who's there?"

"I have given you the wrong room," announced the detective, assuming the voice of the clerk with whom he had spoken below.

The door was instantly opened. Without waiting for the lodger to discover the subterfuge, the detective pushed his way into the room. The guest fell back with an amazed look on his face and exclaimed:

"Hello, this was a trick, eh?"

"Yes, it was a trick," admitted the detective, "and a neat one at that. How easily you did fall for it, didn't you? Sit down and we will talk it over. No need to get excited—"

The lodger was making a suspicious movement with his hands. Instantly he found himself covered by the detective's revolver.

"Hold on, my dear sir, I am fully prepared for you. You see I know your ways," grinned the detective.

The fellow glared. After a moment Weldon spoke:

"We need not fight. I mean you no harm. Listen to me and to what I have to say for a moment. If after that you still desire to fight, very good, we'll have it out here and then."

"What are you doing here in my room?"

"Not much of anything as yet. However, I want to talk with you. You have no reason to fear me for—"

"I have no reason to fear any man."

"You have not?"

"No, I have not."

"That's all right. I'm glad to hear it."

"Why are you here?"

"I have told you once, I would talk with you."

"You want to talk with me?" repeated the man studying the intruder with suspicious eyes.

"Yes."

"Talk away. I am listening."

"My dear sir, what I desire is to sit down and have a friendly talk with you."

"You are an entire stranger to me, sir."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"And yet we have met before," smiled the detective.

"We have?" questioned the man in surprise.

"Yes, we have."

"Will you tell me when and where?"

"Not now, I will tell you all about it later on. I want first to convince you that I am your friend. I am here to do you a service—a great service I might add."

"To do me a service?" mused the man.

"Yes."

"Will you tell me who you are?"

"Yes, with pleasure."

"Please do so."

"I am Bert Weldon, the detective," came the prompt answer.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MUCH STARTLED MAN.

When our hero made the announcement that he was Bert Weldon, the guest gave a violent start. He recoiled a step, his face paling ever so little. At the same time he made a movement as if to draw a

weapon. Then, appearing to have changed his mind, he permitted his hand to drop to his side, saying:

"So you are Bert Weldon, the famous detective?"

"Yes, I am Bert Weldon."

"And you have been shadowing me?"

"I have."

"Will you be good enough to tell me why you have been shadowing me?"

"Yes, under certain conditions. If you will sit down and listen to me calmly I will tell you why I have been shadowing you."

"Let me say I have no reason to fear you—I do not fear you."

"You need have no fears of me. I mean you no harm. I have told you that before and it is the truth."

A curious expression flashed into the face of the lodger as Bert added the words: "You are not a ghost."

"I reckon I'll sit down," announced the man. As he spoke, he took a chair.

"Be good enough to hand that pistol over to me," commanded Bert pointing toward the man's pocket.

"Give it to you?"

"Yes, please."

"But why should I give it to you?"

"In the first place because I wish it, in the second so you will not on a sudden impulse do something that you may immediately afterwards regret."

"You need not fear the weapon."

Bert laughed.

"You should know that I have no fears. I have faced guns before this and I am well able to take care of myself. I fear only for you," he concluded significantly.

"I will keep the weapon. I will place it there."

"All right, old man, and in the meantime we will talk it all over in the most friendly fashion. I will now tell you who you are."

The man's hand was instinctively thrust toward the weapon, then he drew the hand back nervously.

"You will tell me who I am?" he questioned, regarding the detective narrowly.

"I will, yes."

"Who am I?"

"You are——" The detective pronounced the name of the dead burglar. As he did so, he gripped his own revolver ready for instant use, keeping his eyes on the man whom he had pretended to unmask. He evidently expected the lodger to show fight. On the contrary the man merely laughed and said:

"So you do think I am a ghost?"

"A lively one," smiled Weldon.

"Yes, pretty lively after having been dead for more than three years. You are on the wrong track, my friend."

"You do not mean what you say. You are giving me a misleader."

"You think so?"

"Yes, and I ought to know."

"You are Arthur Howard Creeveling," exclaimed the detective suddenly.

When the detective pronounced the latter name the man gave a violent start, betraying great agitation.

Bert Weldon saw at once that he had struck home. A moment the man was silent. At length, he said in a firm tone:

"We will admit for argument's sake that I am

Arthur Howard Creeveling, and now what have you to say? I am listening attentively, you see."

"I have a great deal to say to you. First of all I wish you to understand that I am your friend."

"You are my friend?"

"Yes, I am and I will convince you that I am."

"And I am to consider you a friend when you are seeking to play me for a fool?"

"Yes, that is exactly what you are doing."

"How so?"

"Play you for a fool?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"You admit you are Weldon the detective?"

"Yes."

"And yet you claim to be my friend?"

"I do."

"This is all nonsense."

"Explain, please why you so consider it?"

"You have been employed to run me down all right. I am prepared to be run down."

"We can talk as friends."

"I am ready and willing if you start out straight."

"I will."

"Proceed."

"Look at this."

The detective handed the man a photograph of the girl Eva Wells. The lodger gazed at the picture in amazement, then there came a perplexed look to his face, but he maintained silence.

"You recognize that lady?"

"Suppose I do?"

"She has not yet been returned to her parents. As yet she knows nothing about her parents and she shall not be returned until you consent, provided you can prove to me that any wrong has been done to you. Is not that a fair statement?"

The lodger acted as if he was dazed.

"Come, it is all right, Arthur, you and I are to come to a clear understanding."

"How do you know I am acquainted with this girl?"

"I know all about that."

"You do?"

"I most certainly do."

"Who is she?"

"Her right name is Eva Creevey."

"Ah, Mr. Weldon, you have done well. It appears you have solved the mystery of the girl's life. All right, I do not care. I intended to tell her the truth myself."

"You intended to tell her the truth?" demanded the detective in surprise.

"Yes."

"I am glad to hear you say that. We may come to a perfect understanding now."

"You are employed by this man Creevey?"

"No."

"Why deny it?"

"Because I am not employed by him, that is why."

"Who did employ you?"

"Eva."

The man glanced sharply at the detective. After an interval he said:

"This appears very reasonable."

"I assure you it is reasonable, and I tell you you and I are to come to a perfect understanding. See here."

The detective passed over a photograph of Sue Baxter. The man's eyes rested upon it and his excitement became great. He turned ghastly pale. He trembled violently, and it was evident that for the moment he was too agitated to speak. When he did find voice he demanded in a hoarse whisper:

"In God's name where did you get that picture?"

"You recognize it?"

"I do."

"You know the original?"

"I did once. How did you come into possession of the picture?"

"The picture is that of a noble woman. It is the picture of your wife. You would ask if you dared."

The effect of the detective's last words were startling. The man's face grew instantly livid. The detective feared he was about to fall in a faint. He drew his flask and proffered a quaff of brandy, but the man brushed the flask aside with a trembling hand, and in a voice choked with emotion asked:

"Can you tell me the particulars of this lady's death?"

The detective knew he had the advantage and he determined to go slow.

"Will you admit that the photograph is a picture of the lady who was your wife?"

"I will admit it, yes."

"Why did you desert her?"

The man gazed at Weldon with a pitiful expression upon his face, and mumbled:

"I did not desert her willingly. There is something I do not understand—something I cannot explain."

"If you will be perfectly frank with me we shall be able to reach an explanation very soon."

"I will be perfectly frank."

"Tell me your story."

"I cannot do that."

"You can not?"

"No."

"You must if you expect me to be perfectly frank with you."

"I can tell you nothing."

At this moment a strange suggestion came to the detective's mind. It came like an inspiration, and though it was a startling proposition he determined to act upon it.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DETECTIVE'S BOLD PLAN.

Bert Weldon had determined to adopt a bold plan. During the conversation he had reached certain most startling conclusions. He was now satisfied that the man before him was Arthur Howard Creeveling, and the husband—the mysterious husband of the woman who had assumed the rôle of Sue Baxter.

The detective determined to bring the long-separated husband and wife face to face, let the consequences be as they might.

It was a daring plan, but Bert Weldon was prone to adopt daring and unusual plans, plans that would have caused the average detective to weaken and shrink from.

There had followed a few minutes' silence. The man had been sitting with his eyes fixed upon the photograph of the woman. At length he raised his glances to his companion's face and said:

"It is strange that you should have these two photographs."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will admit that it is strange."

"You are a very remarkable man, Mr. Weldon—you must be."

"I will admit that I have fallen to some very remarkable incidents."

"What connection is there between these two pictures?"

"That is a matter that shall be explained later on, sir."

"Please tell me the particulars of the death of the original of this picture, Mr. Weldon."

"Do you wish to hear the particulars?"

"Indeed I do."

"You are prepared to hear the truth?"

"Yes, -yes."

"You are a man of nerve?"

"I am."

"Very well, then."

"You will tell me?" questioned the other man eagerly.

"I can take you in the presence of a lady who can tell you all about it."

"You can?"

"Yes, I can."

"And you will do so?"

"I will."

The man's face brightened quickly as he said:

"Ah, no!"

He spoke with singular emphasis and suggestiveness.

"I tell you I can."

"This is all a trick. I see now what you are up to."

"What am I up to?"

"You wish to bait me in some way."

"Bait you?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"Well, I see through your game."

"You think you do."

"I know I do."

"Have you anything to fear?"

"No."

"You do not fear arrest?"

"No."

"Then why this attitude?"

"But you may think I do."

"No, but you think I do. I tell you, sir, I am your good friend. I swear on my word and honor that I will take you into the presence of a lady whom you will recognize and she will give you all the facts."

"You are not up to a trick?"

"I am not, I swear. I am in deadly earnest in all that I have said, and I would prove that I am your friend indeed."

The man reflected for some time.

"When will you take me to this lady?" he asked.

"Now, at once."

The lodger pondered over this for a long time. At length he said:

"I will trust you."

"Good. You will find, my dear sir, that your confidence is not misplaced. I will do all that I have said I would as you will learn."

"If you intend a trick, you will regret it in the end."

"Have I not told you that I do not intend a trick? I am only anxious to solve this mystery."

"What mystery?" demanded the man quickly.

"There are a number of very mysterious incidents involved in this whole affair. I cannot explain all of them just now. Later on I shall do so."

"What affair?"

"First, the death of the man—"

"I have nothing to do with his death."

"You are aware that you were considered identical with that man, are you not?"

"I was not aware of anything of the sort."

"It is true, just the same."

"There is no foundation for the suspicion."

"We shall see," answered the detective enigmatically.

"There is a mystery about Eva Wells?"

"I can solve that mystery if anything remains to be explained. I am led to believe, however that you have already solved the mystery of her birth."

"But the mystery of her having been stolen?"

"You have not solved that mystery?"

"No."

"Here arises another mystery. She at this moment supposes herself to be the child of the dead burglar—"

Arthur Creeveling laughed and said:

"It is strange how that man is mixed up in these affairs."

"He is and you can well explain the mystery. I will speak plainly, it is believed that you, Arthur Creeveling, are a burglar."

"It is so believed, eh?"

"Yes, and with apparent good reason."

"By whom?"

"Circumstances indicate that the suspicion is true."

The man smiled and said:

"I'd like to know who suspects me?"

"You would like to know?"

"Yes."

"Your wife suspected you were a burglar. She believed herself the wife of the man—. She looked upon herself as his widow from the incidents after his tragic death was made public—"

Arthur Creeveling did not attempt to explain further.

"You see there are a great many mysteries to be explained," added the detective.

"Yes."

"You can aid in opening up these mysteries."

"I can?"

"Yes, and you will."

"You think I can?"

"I know you can and will."

"There is a great mistake being made by someone."

"I am quite sure of that. But if you will come with me and meet the lady whom I have asked you to meet, many of the mysteries may be fully cleared away. Will you come?"

There came a sudden flash of intelligence to the face of the man Arthur Creeveling.

"I will go with you to meet this lady," he said suddenly.

"You are ready to go?"

"Yes."

"Then we will go at once. You will not be disappointed, I assure you."

"Just one word," interposed Arthur. "If you do mean treachery, as I said before, you will make a great mistake."

"I do not mean treachery. Bert Weldon's word is as good as any man's bond. He never breaks his word after once it is pledged."

"We will go," answered the man with emphasis.

The detective was more excited than he ever had been before in his life, but he did not betray his agitation. He well knew that a dramatic scene was about to occur, but he did not know what the consequences might be. Still, he was confident that he had adopted the right course, come what might. He felt that he had decided rightly. He felt sure that the mystery—at least one of its deepest phases—was about to be solved.

The two men made their way from the lodging house, walking along the street, the detective having decided to walk. He wanted time to think. Few words passed between them until our hero turned into the street on which Sue Baxter's house stood, as did the deserted mansion.

All at once the man appeared to realize where he was. Coming to a sharp halt he grasped the detective's arm, and demanded:

"Are you to take me to number 22?" adding in an excited tone the additional question, "Am I to meet Mr. Creevey?"

"I answer 'no' to both questions," replied the detective. "You must trust me as you have promised to do."

"You do not mean to take me to —— house?"

"No."

"I am not to meet Mr. Creevey?"

"No, I have told you that you are not."

"One more question."

"Name it."

"Are you the man I met in that house?"

"I am."

"What were you doing there?"

Bert Weldon laughed softly.

"I will explain later on. What were you doing there?"

"Possibly I may explain later on."

"All right. We will proceed. I am going to a house on that same row. Have no fears."

"I know I am going to meet Mr. Creevey," exclaimed the man.

"No, you are not."

"Who am I to meet?"

"A lady who will tell you all about your wife, a lady who does not know Mr. or Mrs. Creevey."

A terribly excited glance flashed into the eyes as he said:

"Go ahead. I'll go to —— with you now!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN SUE BAXTER'S HOME.

Bert Weldon led the way directly to Sue Baxter's home.

The hour was late in the afternoon. He opened the door and entered, leading his companion into a handsomely but newly furnished parlor.

"You will please wait here. I will send the lady down."

"You will send her down?"

"Yes."

As our hero started to leave the room he saw that the face of the man was ghastly. Indeed the man was laboring under deep agitation, and the detective muttered in a whisper:

"I wonder if he suspects? He is a keen man. He may."

Ascending the stairs Bert came upon Sue Baxter. It was evident that she was awaiting his coming. The woman looked really beautiful. Some of her old time beauty appeared to have returned to her.

The detective had recently observed that she was recovering her good looks, and he had at the time concluded that ill-health had been responsible for her ghastly looks when he had first met her on that eventful night when she had sought to convey a warning to him.

"I was expecting you," she greeted.

"I am glad to hear that, Sue. How well you look."

"Thank you," replied the woman, a faint trace of color appearing in her cheeks at the words of compliment.

"I can see Mary Carpenter now."

"My health is better, and I have you to thank."

"That was very prettily said. You feel good and strong?"

"I feel a great deal better than I have felt for years."

"I am rejoiced, indeed I am, and I want to tell you that I think we are nearing a solution of all the mysteries that have so disturbed us."

"I have an announcement to make," she said suddenly.

"Let's hear it," smiled the detective.

"I am going away."

"You are going away?"

"Yes, I have so decided."

"May I ask where?"

"I am going to Europe. I have made up my mind that I need rest."

"It is strange that you should have reached this conclusion at this particular time."

"I am determined to go on Lucy's account."

"Very good. But, before you go you can aid me very materially."

"I shall be very happy to aid you in any way possible between now and the time we sail."

"Thank you."

"How may I aid you?"

"There is a gentleman downstairs who desires to ask you some questions."

The woman turned pale and began to tremble.

"Who is the man?" she demanded.

"Some one you have met before," replied Bert evasively.

"Mr. Creevey?"

"You will recognize him when you see him and it is my wish that you answer all his questions freely. It will be better for you to do so."

A thoughtful look appeared on the woman's face and gradually her features became hard and set.

"I will see him," she said.

"Good! I knew you would. Go right down now. He is waiting for you in the parlor."

The woman started to descend the stairs. Our hero took his position at the head of the stairs. He leaned over and saw the woman enter the parlor. There followed an instant's silence, then a scream rang through the house.

"I guess so," muttered the detective, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. He walked back to the room from which he had followed Sue where he began pacing the floor. In this way he passed the time for fully half an hour, when he muttered:

"I reckon I had better go down now. Their explanations are for my ear as well."

Bert descended the stairs. He coughed discreetly as he went down, making all the noise he could and was very slow and deliberate. It was quite evident that he desired to let the two people in the parlor know that he was coming.

The detective entered the room and there sat husband and wife upon the sofa, clasped in each other's arms.

"So far so good," was Bert Weldon's comment, as he stepped into the room.

Both rose upon his entrance and came toward him. Sue exclaimed:

"How shall I ever repay you, friend of my youth, my more than brother?"

There were tears in her eyes and upon her flushed cheeks.

"So you recognize this man, eh?" questioned Bert jovially.

"He is my husband."

"Ah, he is? Well, I thought he must be a relative considering how close you were sitting to each other," laughed Weldon.

"Will you explain all this?"

"Will I explain? Why, my dear madame, I am amazed. All this in order to obtain explanations? I have none to offer. I am seeking them."

"You knew what you were talking about when you hinted that my husband still lives, didn't you?"

"Appearances at present would indicate that I did. And now let's us three settle down and go over the whole business in order to see where we stand. What has our husband told you?"

"Nothing."

"Then you have not exchanged explanations?"

"No, we have been too happy to think of anything else save this joyful meeting. I believed him dead, he believed me dead."

"Ah, then you have had a little explanation?"

"Just a little, yes."

"We must have many. And one thing I wish to observe, your husband was not as much surprised as were you."

"I will plead guilty," smiled Arthur Creeveling. "I did have a premonition that I was to meet my wife."

"Then you did not believe her to be dead?"

"I certainly did until some words you dropped, raised a slight hope in my heart."

"I am glad you are reunited."

A sad look suddenly flashed into the eyes of Arthur Creeveling. The detective instantly observed the change.

"Well, what now?" he demanded.

"I hardly dare ask."

"Is it as serious as that?"

"Yes."

"Name it?"

"I hardly dare ask."

"Ask any question you choose. This is the hour for full confessions. Nothing should be kept back—everything should be told fully and freely. What is your question?"

"To whom—to whom does this house belong?"

"To whom does it belong?" repeated Bert.

"To me," came the answer, and the questioner's wife was the speaker.

Arthur was silent a moment, and our hero who

was watching his face, discovered the suspicions that were running through his mind.

"Go ahead. Ask the next question. You will not be satisfied until you do."

"This house belongs to you?" questioned Arthur turning to his wife.

"It does."

"And all this elegant furniture?"

"Yes."

Again the man fell silent and thoughtful, the detective watching him narrowly.

"Go ahead," suggested the detective in a half malicious tone.

"This house is yours?" repeated Arthur.

"Yes, so I have already said."

"And all this magnificent furniture?"

"Yes."

"You are rich?"

"Yes, I am rich."

"Please tell me how it is that I find you possessed of all this wealth?"

"It came from my father."

"From your father?" repeated the man.

"Yes."

"From no other source?"

"My friend," here interrupted the detective. "Dismiss all unworthy suspicions from your mind. If you are able to prove yourself as pure as your noble wife, you are a fortunate man indeed."

"I cannot. I am a criminal," came the startling admission.

The wife's glance fell, and the husband after a moment of silence, continued, "mine is a strange story."

"Tell us your story," urged the detective.

"I will," came the answer.

CHAPTER XIX.

HIS LIFE'S STORY.

Arthur Creeveling related the facts already known to our readers. He had supposed himself to be the real nephew of the man who had so cruelly cut him off after having led the young man to believe he would inherit the large fortune that afterwards went to the man Creevey.

Arthur claimed that he had been reared to expect that he would inherit a large fortune, and had consequently learned to spend money lavishly. He further admitted that he had drawn a bill on his supposed uncle, but not until after he had been informed that he was to be disinherited.

"I did it," he said, "when delirious from the use of wine, and when I came to my senses I went to my supposed uncle, confessed my sin and begged his forgiveness. He treated me with the utmost cruelty," continued the narrator. "He applied to me the foulest epithets, branded me as a child of infamy and disgrace. I then assailed him, accused him of having misled me, of having reared me in idleness, only asking that he save me, that I would go and earn an honest living. I even offered to go abroad and trouble him no more. This man then confessed that he hated me, that he had always hated me, that he had designedly reared me in luxury, intending to discard me at his will. He also made confessions to me that are not necessary to repeat here."

"During this interview he used the name of Wilbur

Creevey. The latter was a young counsellor at law, and my supposed uncle told me that it was Creevey and his father who had secured for him all the proofs of my birth. I saw at once that it was to this man that I owed the fact of my disinheritance."

At this juncture Bert Weldon asked:

"Do you still believe you are the real heir?"

"I know I am."

"Have you proofs?"

"Yes, I have proofs."

"Does this man Creevey know that you are the real heir?"

"He does."

Weldon then related the explanation that Creevey had made to him.

"The statements are false, he knows they are false!" exclaimed Arthur.

Bert Weldon during his brief interview with Creevey in the lawyer's office, had formed the impression that the man was a sneak, and the detective's wonderfully discerning mind had led him to suspect the truth of the man's story.

"You are positive that you are the real heir?"

"I am the heir at law to some of the estate and I was only debarred from possession because of the supposed fact of my birth."

"That is the charge that you were not the real nephew?"

"Yes."

"You say you have proofs that you are the real heir?"

"I have."

"If that is true, why have you not produced them?"

"I secured these proofs only three years ago."

"Why did you not produce them at once?"

"I will come to that part of my narrative later on. My uncle, as I have said, reviled me and promised prosecution and I became a fugitive. My uncle did as he said he should, and this man Creevey inherited the fortune that rightly belongs to me."

"He claims to be a half nephew of your uncle."

"His claim is false! He manufactured the proofs, and I believe my uncle, who was an unscrupulous man, connived with him to establish these proofs in order to defeat me. My uncle did have a half brother. He was supposed to be dead, but he lives. He is alive to-day. All the proofs of his identity are in his possession and he is prepared to aid me."

"How is it you delayed so long?"

"I did not meet this man until a few weeks ago. I am now ready to proceed against Creevey."

"You are in communication with your uncle's half brother?"

"Yes."

"When did you last see Creevey?"

"One night about three years ago."

"The night the burglar was murdered?"

"Yes."

"Go on with your story."

"I fled from England after my uncle's death, as this man Creevey was hounding me. He was determined to have me convicted, not feeling secure as long as I was at liberty."

"Did you steal the child when you escaped from England?"

"I did not."

"Is the girl Eva Wells his daughter?"

"No."

The detective started in amazement.

"You know the girl?"

"I do. She has been under my protection for years."

"Whose child is she?"

"She is the daughter of Mrs. Creevey's sister, but Mr. Creevey believes her to be his child unless his wife has since confessed the truth. I know she was palmed off on Creevey as his daughter."

"Is her father living?"

"Her mother is."

"And you did not steal this child?"

"I did not."

"Who did?"

"Her own father. As already stated, I had determined to escape to America and one night I met a stranger in London. He appeared to know me though I did not know him. He told me an apparently straight and strange story. His wife had died and ere her death she had made a confession. The confession was a startling story. Her husband was a clerk in Paris. He returned to England only once every two months, and during his absence he had news of the birth of a daughter, and almost immediately he received intelligence of the death of the child."

"The two sisters had entered into a conspiracy?"

"Yes. The elder sister, Mrs. Creevey had married a rich man. She knew she never could become a mother, and she paid her sister a large sum to aid in the conspiracy agreeing to have her daughter become the heiress to the immense estate. The conspiracy was successfully carried out and the real father of Eva Wells did not know he had a daughter living until his wife was on her death bed. She bound him by an oath not to make known her confession to her sister. She told him the whole truth, furnishing him with proofs. After his wife's death he felt bound by his oath. He was a very sensitive man and he asked me what he should do. I told him he could respect his oath and still have revenge, advising him to steal his own child. He did so, and he and I with the child, sailed for America. After our arrival in New York, he said to me one day:

"If it were not for the child I could go out west and make a fortune. I have a very fine opportunity."

"I offered to take charge of the child and then a wicked scheme entered my head. I believed that I could hold the child as a menace over Creevey. I placed her in charge of the woman who is known as her aunt and I have watched over her."

"Has the real father made any effort to find her?"

"He has. He is now a very wealthy man. He married out west, but is again a widower."

"You know how to communicate with him?"

"Yes. But this is not the only wrong I have committed."

"You will do no more wrong," spoke up the wife.

"No," came the answer in an emphatic tone.

"Will you explain how it is you are supposed to be the burglar?"

"I will," was the prompt answer.

CHAPTER XX.

SOLVING THE MYSTERIES.

Bert Weldon's theories in certain directions had been pretty well upset, still he had proved a winner and looked forward to a happy dénouement all around.

"My connection with the burglar," resumed Arthur Creeveling, "is easily explained. He was my partner in crime. Yes, I was a burglar. But let me explain. The man Creevey and his wife came to America. I knew of their presence. They did not recognize me, but shortly after their arrival, I was convicted for burglary and sentenced. But I was an innocent man."

"How was your conviction brought about?"

"Strange as it may seem, I was the victim of mistaken identity. A singular resemblance proved my ruin."

"This part of your story seems rather improbable," said the detective.

"Ah, you must remember that I was friendless. I could not prove my real identity without being arrested for the crime committed in England. English detectives were on my track, therefore I made no attempt to prove my real identity. In prison I made the acquaintance of the man whom I resembled and who was the real robber, and it was for one of his crimes that I was doing time. I became a partner of the man."

The wife's face was ashen as she asked:

"And you were really a criminal?"

"I was a burglar but I never committed a burglary. I studied the methods of burglars and I did enter the house of Creevey. I was there to steal the papers that would prove my right to the estate."

"And that night you met your wife."

"I did."

"And," demanded the wife, "why did you not tell me the whole truth then?"

OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY.

"I wished to wait until I had fully established my innocence. I was merely the burglar's dummy in his crimes. I took no part in his robberies, but he kept me supplied with money and we depended upon our resemblance to establish *alibis*. Many times we succeeded through this strange resemblance."

"Do you know anything about the real burglar's death?"

"I did not until up to a few weeks ago."

"How about the tragedy in the house below here?"

"I had secured certain proofs of my real identity. I called upon the Creeveys, making myself known. I offered to compromise, they refused to treat with me. I later managed to have a secret interview with Mrs. Creevey, and I betrayed the fact that I knew her secret, threatening to denounce her and furnish proofs if she did not induce her husband to deal fairly with me. She demanded a few days for consideration. She wrote me a note asking me to meet her at her home."

"I have that note," interrupted Bert.

"You have that note?"

"Yes."

"Then we have that woman dead to rights. I went to the house convinced that some compromise would be made. I was determined to surrender the child. I went to the house. It proved to be all a trick. Mrs. Creevey played a very cunning game. She had a detective there to arrest me and of course I resisted. I know no more from that moment save as I have heard from others. I was wounded in the head and for days and weeks it was believed that I would die. When I did recover, my memory was a blank. I was placed in an asylum where I remained for three years."

"How long have you been cured?"

"About six weeks."

"And why did you not come to me?" demanded the wife.

"I did seek you, but received the most positive proofs that you were dead."

Arthur had little more to tell, and it came his wife's turn to tell her story, which she did, explaining all that was unknown to her husband.

A long consultation followed. When the detective at length departed alone he proceeded to his lodgings a well satisfied man. He found young Murray await-

ing him and to whom the detective made full explanations. Shortly after his arrival home there came a summons.

Bert knew what it meant. He hurried to the house to which he had tracked the woman who had made the agreement with Eva Wells. A party was awaiting him and he was shown into the parlor. There he encountered a strange sight. The man Sparks and Gwin were in handcuffs and opposite to them sat Billy Bond.

The woman had entered into a conspiracy to entrap and kidnap Eva Wells. But Billy Bond, acting under Bert's instructions, had done his work well. The woman had also made a full confession and lent her assistance in order to save herself.

"Well, I reckon I've got you fellows this time," announced Bert as he entered the room.

The men were silent.

"I have a little resort up the river to which I can send you two unless you make terms."

"Can I serve you?" demanded Sparks.

"You can."

"And make it a compromise?"

"Yes."

The detective led Sparks to another room where he made terms with him. The man agreed to establish the innocence of Sidney Murray. He was then to leave New York forever, young Gwin also being doomed to banishment. Upon the following day, Sparks, the detective and Sidney Murray called upon the firm for whom Sidney had worked. Explanations followed, wholly exonerating the young man. A visit was then paid to the district attorney's office. When the party came forth, Sidney Murray was a free man. He returned to Bert's lodgings while the latter proceeded to the home of Eva Wells. There, long explanations followed, the detective finally proceeding to the office of Mr. Elger where he remained for many hours. His final visit was to the home of Mrs. Creeveling. Events were moving very rapidly now.

A week full of activity passed, during which Bert Weldon was working day and night to close up the matter finally. At the end of the week a gentleman arrived in New York. He was called upon by the detective and Arthur Creeveling. The gentleman was registered as Mr. Gadway. Our hero and his companion were shown to the gentleman's room. There

followed immediate recognitions between Gadway and Creeveling, and then long explanations followed.

Mr. Gadway was the father of Eva Wells, and he was indeed a happy man almost wild with joy when brought into the presence of his long-lost daughter. No less happy was Eva herself.

A day or so later there were gathered at the house of Mrs. Creeveling on an eventful evening, a strange assemblage. Bert Weldon was there, also Mr. and Mrs. Creevey, Mr. Elger the lawyer, Mr. and Mrs. Creeveling, Eva Wells, Sidney Murray, and the Uncle of Arthur Creeveling and Mr. Gadway.

Bert Weldon was the master of ceremonies. First he introduced Arthur Creeveling and Mr. Elger, then Mr. and Mrs. Creevey and the uncle, later on Mr. Gadway was introduced and finally Eva Wells and Sidney Murray were introduced to the company. When the party separated at a late hour, a great deal of business had been disposed of. Mrs. Creevey was forced to confess after which her husband was compelled to own up his iniquities. He was forced to do this, because the proofs were at hand and Mr. Elger had fully prepared him for the terrible ordeal. The result was that two-thirds of the property was made over to the rightful heir. The property being principally personal a settlement was easily made, the real estate in England being left in the possession of the Creeveys.

One week following these incidents, everything was closed up. Bert Weldon received a handsome reward for his splendid services. Bert made several suggestions that were adopted. Mr. Gadway consented to the marriage of his daughter and Sidney Murray. After the ceremony the young bride and her husband proceeded west with her father.

Later on Arthur Creeveling decided to take up his residence in Germany. He went there with his wife, her beauty recovered and her heart light. They took with them their protégé Lucy.

A year later Bert Weldon sailed for Germany and when he returned he brought a bride with him, and her name was Lucy.

THE END.

The next issue will be

Old Sleuth Weekly, No. 166,

Entitled,

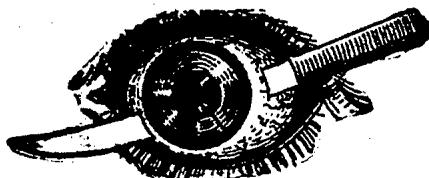
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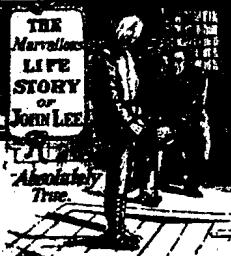
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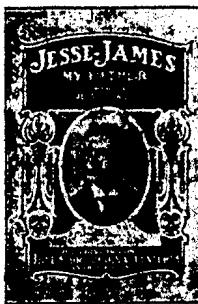
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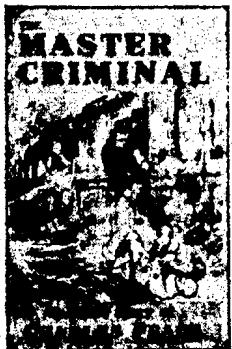


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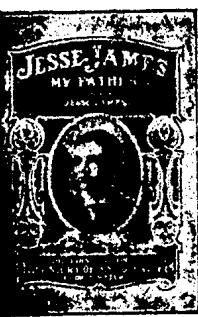
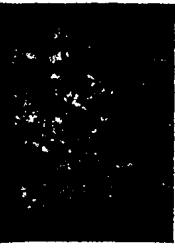
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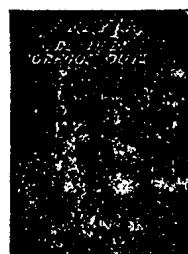


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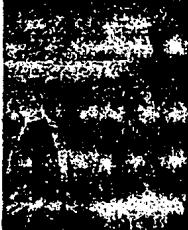
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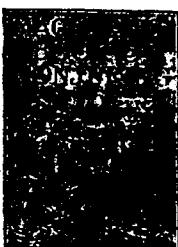
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No. 3.	THE BLACK DEATH	or The Curse of the Navajo Witch
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